

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Julia M. Green for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Speech Communication, Speech Communication, and Art presented on June 11, 2014.

Title: Visual Imagery On Social Media: Increasing Power Through The Use of Photographs on Social Media

Abstract approved:

Trischa Goodnow

Scholars promote the ability of visual imagery to have a number of political campaigning benefits such as influencing opinions and attitudes and encouraging vibrant, striving democracy while improving the quality of public knowledge and opinion. However, previous research on this subject has failed to identify how presidential candidates display their power on Facebook. Additionally, there is a lack of research on how Obama uses Facebook to display his power visually during the 2008 presidential campaign. In order to respond to these issues, this study uses Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) social semiotic analysis in order to determine what visual signs and symbols are serving as references to power and also to establish how Obama's power is being displayed on Facebook. Results of this study show that Obama's display of power was less important during the campaign. In addition, this lack of power is used to put the focus on the American people and the problems they are facing and encourage the development of solutions.

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Visual Imagery On Social Media: Increasing Power Through The Use of Photographs
on Social Media

by
Julia M. Green

A THESIS

Submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented June 11, 2014
Commencement June 2015

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies thesis of Julia M. Green presented on June 11, 2014.

APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Speech Communication

Director of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Julia M. Green, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking my advisor, Dr. Trischa Goodnow, who put in an incredible amount of time and energy to help me achieve my goals with this thesis and as a student. I would not have been able to achieve these goals without your counseling, guidance and support. To my thesis committee members, Dr. Erin Gallagher and Dr. Jim Folts, thank you for your willingness to help, support and lead me in the right direction. To the rest of the Speech Communication department, I appreciate your encouragement and continued interest in my education and success. To Dad, Mom and Maria, thank you for all of the prayers, enthusiasm and support throughout my masters program. To my roommates and friends who were always willing to listen to my research and provide support also through prayer and encouragement. Finally, I would like to thank Jesus Christ for giving me a passion for education and research, and for providing love, support, friendship and joy during my masters program. I love you all and thank you for making my masters program one of my most treasured experiences so far.

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Visual Imagery on Social Media: Increasing Power Through The Use of Photographs on Social Media.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

On election night, 2012, Barack Obama tweeted “Four More Years” above a picture of him hugging the first lady. Within two hours Obama’s tweet became the most legendary tweet of all time with a whopping 414,520 retweets (Ortiz, 2012). Is social media an election game changer -- the way television changed the debates between Nixon and Kennedy (Strong, 2012)? There is not enough research to say whether social media caused Barack Obama to win the 2012 presidential election. However, visual imagery uploaded by political leaders or their campaigns on social media could have some influence in the elections. The adoption of such visual imagery on social media requires researchers to evaluate these new strategies and rethink some of the traditional approaches to presidential campaigning.

In 2008, 87% of American adults used the Internet (Pew, 2014). During the 2008 election more than half of the adult population were online political users. This means that three-quarters (74%) of Internet users (55% of Americans) went online during the 2008 election to gain information about the campaign or to take part in it (Pew, 2014). In addition, 66% of those online adults participated in social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook or LinkedIn (Pew, 2014). This was the first time the Pew Internet & American Life Project had found more than half of the voting-age population using the Internet to connect to the political process during the election cycle.

The numbers stayed consistent in during the 2012 presidential election with 67% of online adults using the social networking sites such as Facebook (Duggan, 2013). However, 12% of Americans began to regularly turn to Facebook for campaign news which was roughly on par with the percent of Americans who got their campaign news from national newspapers, NPR and late night comedy shows (Smith, 2013). Smith (2013) found that social networks were used as a mainstream venue for political discussion, a space for activism and a place where people went to support their political views. In addition, he found political engagement to be highly social, occur in real time and happening on a wide range of platforms and devices (Smith, 2013).

The 2008 and 2012 presidential elections marked a significant transition of campaign strategies specifically relating to social media. Smith (2011) from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project stated that "the social networking population as a whole has grown larger and demographically more diverse in recent years, the same is true when it comes to political activity on social networking sites." The increase of adult user engagement with social networking sites, such as Facebook, breeds ground for political campaigns to communicate information about candidates through the use of photographs.

Research scholars have noted many advantages and disadvantages for candidates on social networking sites although there are no studies that look at how candidates display their power on social media platforms such as Facebook. However, scholars have researched the nonverbal behaviors of powerful individuals. For example, Carney (2010) found that when people enact certain nonverbal poses of power the expression extends "beyond mere thinking and feeling, to physiology and subsequent behavioral choices"

(p.1363). In addition, she found that people expect certain emotions and nonverbal cues from powerful and powerless people (Carney, 2010). I took interest in Carney's research and wondered if powerful individuals mirrored powerful nonverbals on their Facebook pages?

I find the research surrounding social networking sites and nonverbal displays of power to be beneficial for presidential campaigns. However, I realized there was a gap in literature combining how presidential candidates display power on Facebook. Particularly, there are no studies that examine specifically how Obama displays power visually through Facebook cover photographs. With the increase of candidates and adults using social networking sites for political use, specifically Facebook, it seems sensible to consider the impacts of power and photographs as it pertains to Obama's official Facebook profile.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how political leaders communicate power through visual imagery on social media. Specifically I will examine how Obama and his campaign use Facebook cover photographs to display signs of power or lack thereof. Although visual imagery on social media is a relatively new area of research, scholars promote the ability of visual imagery to have a number of benefits such as attracting readers to stories (Garcia & Stark, 1991), improve recall and comprehension (Paivio & Csapo, 1973), increase cognitive elaboration (Lynn, Shavitt, & Ostrom, 1985), influence opinions and attitudes (Givson, Hester, & Stewart, 2001; Gibson & Zillmann, 2000), and to encourage a vibrant, thriving democracy while improving the quality of public knowledge and opinion (Coleman & Wasike, 2004). There is limited research about

campaign visual imagery on social media and even less data examining how Obama has used visual imagery on social media to display power.

There is a current neglect of academic literature's analysis of the use of power on Facebook and specifically on Obama's Facebook. In order to fill this gap in literature, I will use Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) social semiotic analysis, which provides an appropriate methodology for evaluating how Obama displays power through the use of Facebook cover photos. Determining the signs and symbols within the cover photographs will allow us to see how Obama displays his power, or lack thereof. This type of investigation offers a way to look at how the signs visually represent meaning through three areas of compositional analysis: informational values, salience and framing. These three areas will provide the framework for the study.

Following the introduction, chapter two of this thesis presents a literature review that will examine surrounding research and will act as a justification for this study. This chapter will explore current academic literature providing a historical timeline of the different mediums used in the U.S. for political campaigning while also analyzing various aspects of political imagery, political image, political impression management, visual imagery interconnected to text, and nonverbal displays of power. This review will provide a clear overview of the surrounding research as well as demonstrate the current lack of research exploring the particular subject that this thesis will address. Chapter three introduces the methodology that will be used to evaluate Obama's cover photographs. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) social semiotic analysis will be established in order to clarify exactly how the photographs will be analyzed. Chapter four will provide the actual analysis of the photographs. In this chapter the

methodologies presented in chapter three will be used to provide a detailed analysis of Obama's cover photographs in order to determine how power is being presented visually. The conclusion in chapter five will provide the analysis found in chapter four and evaluate these findings. In addition, the conclusion will establish how future research can benefit from this thesis.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of U.S. Political Campaigning: The Medium Impacts The Message

Presidential campaigning shifts with the tides of technology. It is important to look at the history and evolution of the mediums used for political communication in the United States because “the medium does impact the message in terms of types of appeal, verbal style, and modes of delivery” (Barnet, 1979). During the mid 1700s political communication put an emphasis on public and eloquent oratory. People attended political events and would often have “banners, bands and even fireworks” (Trent, 2011, p.365).

At one point radio was the dominant medium soon followed by television (Trent, 2011, p.365). As the mediums of technology progressed from radio to television the methods of delivery began to adapt to meet the needs of the new communication channels (Barnet, 1979). As televisions began to fill American homes, candidates felt the pressure to put greater thought into their appearance and presentation. Television revolutionized the way people viewed the candidates. Television was said to have an unforgiving nature because the camera’s new technology now recorded every movement and word for the world to watch (Trent, 2011). The video cameras took different angles and depths while recording. Voters could now watch presidential debates from the comfort of their own homes and could even have a closer view of the candidate’s movements and facial reactions due to the zoomed in video recording. Because of this new medium of technology, the audience was able to make new judgments towards the candidates.

The 1960 presidential debate between Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard Nixon was the first presidential debate between candidates from

opposing political parties as well as the first one to be televised. The debate was aired both on television and radio. The audience who watched the debate on television thought Kennedy won by a landslide, while radio audiences thought Nixon won by a landslide (Trent, 2011). The debate is best known by the physical appearance and preparedness of both candidates rather than by their subject matter. Nixon was teased because of the sweat caught on camera. Nixon appeared unhealthy, peaked, and awkward while Kennedy appeared tan, poised and attractive. Nixon was in the process of recovering from a hospitalized knee injury. Just prior to the debates Nixon had a strenuous campaign where he appeared in all 50 states including the newly added Hawaii and Alaska. Nixon had not shaved prior to the debates and requested no make-up be applied to his face, which exposed his stubble to the television audience (Trent, 2011). Kennedy took time to apply facial make-up and rested prior to the debates. He also took into consideration his suit color and chose a darker shade, which contrasted well against the background. Consequently, with the era's black and white television screens, Nixon's gray suit appeared to blend in with the background (Trent, 2011).

The television allowed the audience to feel a sense of intimacy with the candidates. The mass media system was growing largely because of the widespread use of television. More people began to own televisions and it was beginning to replace interpersonal conversations and meetings as a leisure time activity (Kraus, p.123). Candidates' speeches were perceived as conversations to audience members (Denton, 1988). This perceived conversation created a sense of trust and friendship or conversely emotions of distrust and judgment (Trent, 2011, p. 366).

Television news also began to evolve. During the 1950s, one person filmed against a blank wall read the television news; the next twenty years began to move outside of the room into dramatic displays of historical and international events. From sit-ins and marches of the social movements, to the funeral of a young president, to riots and burning of U.S. cities, to battles of the war in Vietnam, all contributed to the development of U.S. televised news (Blomquist, p.7). The television news had the ability to inform the audience about current events through the technological advances of motion picture. The visual imagery on the television had the ability to allow audience members to be informed on current events in real time without the delay of printing and publication. Consequently, this new visual imagery introduced candid, spur-of-the-moment and unrehearsed communication. Accordingly, the audience was able to develop feelings of faith and dependability in the visuals they were viewing on TV. The audience did not question the validity of the traditional news media they were watching because they had faith that the visual imagery was true. Although the news programs had the ability to filter the information they chose to display, much like today, and the audience was limited on the campaign information they received. The invention of the Internet and its widespread popularity in the 1990s took campaign news and visual imagery down a different, more nontraditional path.

In the 1992 and 1994 campaigns, candidates began to incorporate nontraditional media outlets. Traditional media outlets included one-way communication methods such as billboards, banners, speeches, brochures and mail. Nontraditional media outlets included the Internet, radio and television talk shows, morning talk shows, MTV, and late night talk shows to present their messages direction to the American people. Talk shows,

such as *Larry King Live* and the morning talk shows, allowed the candidates to answer more “softball questions” designed to boost their imageⁱ (Bernstein, 1992).

Morning talk shows, late night talk shows and MTV allowed the candidates to sidestep the pressure and grilling they received from the traditional media outlets (Johnson, 1999). Nontraditional media outlets, such as talk shows, humanized the candidates and improved their image in the eyes of the public by allowing them to appear directly before the public unfiltered by the traditional news media (Pease, 1992). Although talk shows provided a relatively new approach to campaigning, the 1996 campaign birthed a new medium that altered the dynamics of the election process much like television did when it overcame newspapers’ campaign dominance (Maney, 1996).

President Bill Clinton was the first recorded candidate to significantly use the Internet as a medium to dispense information in his 1992 campaign (Trent, 2011). During his term of presidency two trillion dollars were invested to create the largest expansion of the Internet and the establishment of the Office of Electronic Publishing and Public Access Electronic Mail (Gronbeck, 2008). The Internet began to grow in popularity as a campaign outlet as more candidates realized the benefits of the new media. The Internet was getting a “test drive” as a new campaign medium.

Both major parties created a web presence by 1996 along with about half of Senate candidates and about 15 percent of House candidates (Foot, p.8). Selnow (1998) suggests that 1996 was the first year that political campaigns used the Web for “mass campaigning.” More significantly, expanded coverage of the elections started to be posted online as all the major news networks and organizations began to develop websites. The news websites included video, news reports, and poll results throughout

the election period (Friedenberg, 1997). The Internet allowed the candidates' messages to be received by greater numbers of people. Many mass communication scholars began to question the influence of the Internet on voter perceptions.

Braima, Johson, and Sothiraja (Johnson, 1999) examined the extent to which heavy users of the Internet and other nontraditional media differ from heavy users of traditional media in their knowledge of the issue stances of Bill Clinton and Bob Dole as well as their images of the two candidates. Their findings suggested that nontraditional media had small influence on political knowledge but had larger impact on images of the two candidates.

The Pew Research Center (2003) had significant findings concerning the Internet and its roll in the campaigning process: 22% of Internet users sought election news through the Internet in 2002 compared to 15% in 1998; some 97% of those using the Internet for information sought information on candidates' positions in 2002 compared to 69% in 2000; major news organizations' websites such as CNN and *The New York Times* were the leading sources of campaign news, with roughly half of election news consumers going to these websites. By 2002 most political candidates had developed and were updating political websites, conducting political research (e.g., questionnaires) with their websites, and political websites were used as one vehicle for communicating with the press (e.g., news release) (Pew, 2003). Also, most political candidates were posting endorsements from famous people on their websites and political websites were not perceived as interactive sites for users and potential voters (Pew, 2003).

Pollard (2009) concluded that websites used "text-based interactivity" with "written forms of expressions" and some photographs and graphics. Pollard (2009)

discovered that the text-based presentations seemed more conversational and “live” with a sense of immediacy, personal presence and multivocality (Pollard, 2009, p.578).

Research also considered Web sites as a “pull” media experience since the Web user had to seek out the candidate’s website and choose what information to view (Pollard, 2009).

There were many advantages and disadvantages of the Internet for candidates considered by research scholars. Selnow (1998) described the Internet unlike any other medium; it is the “master medium.” Like newspapers, the Internet can distribute text and photos. Like radio, the Internet can upload audio. Like television, the Internet can disseminate videos. Other advantages included the growing size of potential Internet audiences and the inexpensive advertising. Selnow (1998) pointed out the contrast in cost between television ads and websites:

You need writers, producers, camera operators...For television spots, you need someone to place the ads and buy the time... And if the candidates appear in the spots, they must prepare, report to a studio, and powder up before they sit in front of the camera... The Internet posed no such barriers. In fact, campaigns were confronted by an army of young workers and volunteers [to develop webpages] (p.83).

Selnow (1998) also suggested the Internet benefited the candidate due to the opportunity to communicate directly to voters:

You set the agenda and discuss the things you find important. If you don’t want to bring up the fact that you misled kids on the spelling of potato, you don’t have to. Instead, you can brag about your proper spelling of most vegetables or about your constituent services or your war record (p.85).

Stone (1996) brought up another advantage to Internet campaigning. Trevor Kaufman, a member of the company that designed the Clinton/Gore site in 1996 said that he wanted to create a quick response time for the audience. “One of our missions is making sure the site is very modular so the campaign can do some rapid-response updating as we get closer to the election” (Stone, 1996, p.44). Filming and distributing a TV spot takes time and money. The Web allowed for quicker information dissemination along with a faster edit and reload if mistakes had been made.

Along with the advantages of the Internet for candidates during the elections came the disadvantages. Pollard (2009) researched this topic and found that some voters weren’t connected to the Internet and would never surf the Web. Second, many of those who use the World Wide Web did not visit the candidates’ websites. Pollard (2009) stated that political candidates needed to work to entice the huge potential audience of Internet by attracting views to websites. With the next adaption of the Internet in 1999, coined Web 2.0 by Darcy DiNucci, candidates and their campaigns no longer had to entice viewers to their websites; they moved their web presence to social media spaces (DiNucci, 1999).

Web 2.0 was considered the second wave of the Internet, which marked the age of social media and technology (Trent, 2011, p. 371). DiNucci was a web designer and used the term in relation to design and aesthetics in her article targeted at Web designers where she argued that coding for the Web needed to take account of an increasing range of hardware including mobile devices (Macnamara, 2010, p.49). Web 2.0 represented a new way of using the Internet. Websites designed for social purposes began to increase

in popularity. Up to this point the Internet had followed the characteristics of one-way communication with an exception for email.

MySpace, created in 2003 by Tom Anderson and Chris DeWolfe, marked the first significant social media to impact politics in 2007 (Trent 2011). MySpace provided users with the ability to make personalized Web profiles. The site's original structure provided a spot for a profile picture, background music when viewers accessed the page, and the ability to post messages on other people's walls. The site created an "Impact Channel" which provided links to candidates' blogs, websites, pictures, and videos (Trent, 2011). In the 2008 election, Barack Obama immediately saw the significance of his presence on social media. Obama was recorded to have 850,000 "friends" on MySpace by the end of his 2008 presidential campaign (Baumgartner). MySpace allowed Obama to enter into people's online worlds.

One year after MySpace was created Mark Zuckerberg and his roommates from Harvard University launched Facebook. The name came from a colloquialism for the directory given to students at American universities. The website's membership was originally limited to Harvard University students. By 2006 anyone with a university email could sign up (Trent, pg.272). Like MySpace, the site provided a personalized webpage where users were able to express themselves by adding a profile picture, personalized thoughts or ideas through status updates, and access to write on friends' webpages. Immediately after Facebook opened up to the public, the site began hosting political pages where supporters could connect. Candidate information was also given on a page called "Election Pulse" where users could view candidate's Facebook profiles (Trent, pg.372).

These social networking sites created a new vehicle of communication where visual imagery and text about oneself could be displayed on one's homepage. Social media also spawned a new environment for political communication. Candidates were able to connect with voters by posting MySpace and Facebook status updates and visual images. Users felt closer and more connected to the candidates because of the shared social circles on these websites. These social networking sites allowed campaigns to target voters and to stay connected in a variety of ways throughout the campaign process (Mckay, 2012).

With the increase of social media activity and popularity, campaigns have begun paying more attention to Facebook as a means of distributing information to users. Social media websites like MySpace and Facebook are unique in their nature in that users can feel connected and in touch with the candidates themselves through posts such as status updates, photos, videos, and links to other sites. Users can then click the "like button" and comment on the status, photos, videos and links to show their support. "Posting photos and videos also enhances interest" and foot traffic to the candidates' profile pages (Trent, 2011, p.372). In the 2008 campaign Barack Obama had more than two million friends on Facebook, compared to McCain's 600,000 (Trent, 2011, p.372).

Today there are one billion users on Facebook. Candidates have begun to hire technology specialists to help manage their social media spaces and to ensure they are being portrayed in the desired light. The Internet, specifically social media, has evolved to a space where people can unite and where physical location does not affect one's ability to see, hear, read and stay connected with other online users. Although visual imagery on social media is a relatively new area of research, scholars promote the ability

of visual imagery to have a number of benefits such as influencing opinions and attitudes (Givson, Hester, & Stewart, 2001; Gibson & Zillmann, 2000), and encouraging vibrant, striving democracy while improving the quality of public knowledge and opinion (Coleman & Wasike, 2004, p.458).

Assessing Political Imagery

Benoit, Blaney & Pier (1998) looked at how political candidates for public offices persuade voters they are preferable to other competitors. The authors found three means by which candidates publically position themselves above the rest: acclaims of self-praise, attacks or negative comments or criticism directed at opponents and defenses that refute attacks and charges made by opponents. Acclaims provide voters with various reasons to vote for the candidate, attacks provide reasons to vote against other opponents and defenses act as responses to attacks made by other opponents. Candidates have historically used these three tactics for persuasion through whatever medium they could. In the 2000 presidential election candidates used their websites to accomplish these three objectives through text (Wicks, Souley, & Verser, 2003).

Many researchers have studied visual images through a methodology of coding to see which candidate was perceived more favorable during the 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns. Coding usually involves first selecting certain photographs to analyze. Next, the researchers choose a list of attributes to look for in the photographs. Attributes could include camera angle, light source, body position, gestures etc. The last step includes coding analysis where the researchers keep track of which attributes are in each photograph. During the 1984 presidential campaign, Moriarty and Garramone (1986)

coded each photograph or illustration of the candidates from a variety of magazines and newspapers during a given time frame. *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News and World Report* were analyzed for ten visual attributes-torso, arm position, hands, face, setting, dress, interaction, position, size, and camera angle (Moriarty & Garramone, 1986). The researchers added up which candidate had more favorable visual attributes displayed in the magazines. The researchers found that Reagan's pictures outnumbered Mondale's 124-87 and statistically was portrayed more favorably in the magazines.

Since the 1984 presidential campaign, the same coding investigation has been applied to more recent elections. Moriarty and Popovich (1991) took the same approach during the 1988 presidential election between former Vice President George Bush and opponent Michael Dukakis. The researchers used the same three newsmagazines and coded for 15 visual attributes-activity, posture, arm position, hands, eyes, expression, props, setting, dress, interaction, family presence, camera angle, portrayal, position, and size (Moriarty & Popovich, 1991). They found that the newsmagazines mostly had a balanced visual coverage although the Republican candidates received larger sized pictures than the Democratic candidates and were portrayed more favorably. This continued throughout the time frame of the research study (Verser, 2006, p.182).

In sum, political imagery can be assessed through a methodology of coding for visual attributes. Attributes such as camera angle, body position, light source, gestures, arm position, expression, props, dress, interaction, and size can contribute to the meaning of the photograph.

Political Impression Management

Presidential candidates seek to portray the best impression they can on voters. Impression management theory (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Tedeschi, 1991) deals with how people encourage positive impressions of themselves to others while avoiding the creation of negative impressions. The origins of impression management theory in a communication context can be traced back to theorists such as Goffman (1974) and Burke (1968) and empirical research on agenda setting from McCombs & Shaw (1972).

Impression management is the behavior exhibited by a person with the intention of manipulating or directing impressions formed by others (Verser, 2006, p.180). Since the 1970s psychologists have been interested in impression management. Impression management theory relies upon expectancy-value principles where positive impressions lead to positive outcomes (Verser, 2006, p.180). This theory asserts that people have the ability to influence, regulate and control the perceptions of events, people and objects. Control and regulation of people's perceptions can be done consciously or subconsciously.

Visual imagery is a way that political candidates are able to manage the impressions they make on potential voters. Visual imagery plays an important role in the campaign process. Fleming (1998) stated: "Every campaign impression and message should build on and reinforce the first one and the last one that voters see or hear before they make up their minds and vote" (p.50). Effective commercials, speeches, news releases and campaign photographs will seek to reinforce reoccurring themes of the candidates (Verser, 2006). The projection of an image of competency, motivation, and productivity are desired outcomes in impression management (Baumeister, 1989; Jones

& Pittman, 1982). Visual imagery has the ability to produce an emotional response in voters if they can generate positive feelings about candidates.

Research shows that when a candidate demonstrates positive affect cues there is a direct correlation with their perceived attractiveness and likability (Bayes, 1970, Mehrabian, 1981). Positive affect cues include smiles, head nods and raising eyebrows (Verser & Wicks, 2006). Other cues have been linked to perceived higher likability such as a candidate's attire or physique (Burgoon et al., 1996, Verser, 2006, p.183).

Current applications of impression management theory can be associated with framing theory where researchers analyze new messages through content analysis and then distinguish opinions, beliefs and attitudes in hopes to gain understanding to perceived meanings among audience members (Wicks, 2005, 2006). Verser & Wicks (2006) looked at the contemporary application of impression management theory in how campaigns strive to present attributes of candidates that will lead to positive perceptions on the part of the voters (discussed in detail earlier in my research).

Many politicians act out impression management theory because they realize that specific behaviors and images are necessary for a positive impression from the voter leading to a positive evaluation. Campaigns strive to present these positive affect cues leading to positive perceptions toward the candidates on the part of the voters. Thus, the positive outcome in political campaigning is convincing voters to perceive the candidate to be more likable and attractive and eventually winning elections (Verser & Wicks, 2006).

Political Image

Recent presidential campaigns have begun to recognize the potential of the Internet in shaping political images and managing impressions among voters. The term, political image, is not to be confused with the photograph or any visual image. The political image references the general persona of a candidate. The persona doesn't necessarily refer to a person's looks, rather the identity, personality and role of a candidate.

Visual imagery, such as photographs, have many benefits for candidates such as shaping attitudes about people, gaining attention of audience members, gaining credibility and evoking feelings (Graber, 1988). Voters are able to form impressions, opinions and beliefs about political candidates through the photographs they see (Verser, 2006, p.179). Photographs can enable a viewer to form an intuitive understanding concerning the personality behind the image even when a candidate's behavior is rehearsed or scripted (Verser, 2006, p.179). Although candidates often used the text-based portion of their websites in 2000 to enhance the positive attributes of their political image, the visuals posted on candidate websites had the advantage of presenting positive attributes of the candidates (Wicks, Souley, & Verser, 2003). Features such as camera angle, color and light angle all influence the viewer's perception of the candidate's political image. This is because the viewer believes that what he or she is viewing is real and honest.

Verser & Wicks (2006) focused their research on the 2000 presidential election and the political images of the presidential candidates appearing on their official campaign websites. They also evaluated the visual strategies the candidates used and the

overall themes of the images. Verser & Wicks (2006) found that the candidates appeared to present campaign photographs in ways that may have been orchestrated to enhance their appeal and reverse negative media portrayals.

Verser & Wicks (2006) first sought to research whether differences existed in the ways imagery was employed on the official websites of George W. Bush and Al Gore. The two candidates had a total of 569 photographs with 502 on the Gore site and 67 on the Bush site. The photographs on Gore's webpage changed sometimes two or three times a day while Bush's webpage photographs stayed the same during the course of the study. The photographs on Gore's page highlighted, illustrated or reinforced the main theme of the story of the day (Verser, 2006). Researchers also found that photographs from each of Gore's campaign stops were pictorially documented onto the website gallery while Bush's campaign rarely added new images.

After looking at the quantity of photographs on the candidate's websites, the authors examined the attributes in the photographs using the Pearson chi-squares statistical procedure. Along with the positive affect cues discussed earlier, other attributes have shown the ability to promote attractiveness and likeability such as eye gaze, touch, close proximity, gesturing, dress and forward leaning (Heslin & Boss, 1980; Mehrabian, 1969; Patterson, 1977).

Based on the body of research, Verser & Wicks proposed a cluster of 15 attributes derived from impression management theory that promotes a positive political image. Attributes for analysis included: Activity (candidate demonstrating dynamic behavior such as speaking, shaking hands, and kissing babies versus passive or lethargic activity such as listening, reading or dozing), Hands (candidate has hands gesturing versus at side

or at rest), Interaction (candidate appearing before cheering crowds or attentive colleagues versus alone or with inattentive crowds or colleagues), Leadership (candidate appears to be leader or may be at the front of a group of people versus images of the candidate as one of the guys or may be following behind other people), Posture (candidate standing tall and upright versus bowed, slumped or leaning), Arms (arms raised head high or above versus at side, resting or folded), Distance (candidate appears close to other people and able to be physically touched versus far from others in the photograph), Domination (dominates the photo versus appearing more tangential, among a group), Expression (candidate is cheerful or confident versus unhappy, worried or tired), Seriousness (candidate appears serious about presidential duties versus images of playfulness or not focused on campaign issues), Dress (candidate attired in suit and tie versus less formal clothes), Speech (candidate addressing a large audience versus one or two individuals), Attention (candidate appears as the center of attention versus among a group), Eye Contact (candidate looking directly at camera or at someone versus looking up, down or with eyes closed), Issue Versus Image (candidate focused on campaign issue or on self-image). The authors also added in two additional attributes: Time (historical, childhood or pre-campaign image versus current photograph often depicting campaign events) and Props (patriotic images that contain symbols like flags, bunting and presidential seals versus images such as graphs and charts).

The authors also evaluated the photographs with a second cluster of two attributes relating to photographic setting and appearance: Family (candidate presented either with or without family members) and Setting (presenting monumental or formal settings

versus informal settings). These two additional attributes have been linked to a better political image (Moriarty & Garramone, 1996; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991).

Finally the authors coded based on a third cluster of seven attributes related to photographic production values. Camera Angle (looking up at candidate versus looking down on candidate), Color (full color photograph versus black and white or monochrome), Portrayal (candidate appears dignified, serious or presidential versus whimsical), Camera Focus (image is either focused or out of focus), Light Direction (candidate is lit from the front or light appears from behind), Background (candidate in light or sun verses dark or cloudy), Light Angle (candidate is lit from above or below). These attributes related to photographic production values influence the interpretive processes (Messaris, 1992,1993, 1997; Messaris & Abraham, 2001).

After coding the photographs from Gore and Bush's websites, the authors found that Gore's website generally conveyed a sense of "activity, with the candidate frequently interacting with others, standing erect, waving to crowds and holding his hands in the air. He was often in close proximity to supporters and many images presented him appearing to seriously contemplate issues that prospective voters might be asking. Gore mingled with the public in diners and/or schools and was often dressed informally" (Verser & Wicks, 2006, p.189). Bush was displayed being less active and often alone in photographs. He was rarely seen in close proximity to potential voters and was often dressed in a business suit. The authors concluded that in regards to impression management theory, Gore's photo gallery displayed photographs linking him to human interaction while Bush was presented as a professional public servant ready for leadership (Verser & Wicks, 2005, p.189).

Grabe and Bucy (2009) took their research a step further than Verser and Wicks by analyzing the attitudes associated with candidate photographs from the 2000 and 2004 elections. To do this, the authors took the content of the images to create frames that news photographs project of the candidates. The authors suggested that photographs create three frames from which politicians hope to encourage voters to view them: the Ideal Candidate, the Populist Campaigner and the Sure Loser. Grabe and Bucy believe that political images move toward one of these frames. The Ideal Candidate frame focuses on the character of the candidate and is broken down into two themes: statesmanship and compassion. This includes images of candidates with signs and symbols of patriotism, children, families and high-ranking peers (Grabe and Bucy, 2009). The Populist Campaigner frame draws attention to the ideals of the average person and can be broken down into two themes: mass appeal and ordinariness. This frame often displays the candidate in front of large enthusiastic crowds, through attire or through images that show athletic ability (Grabe and Bucy, 2009). The Sure Loser frame shows a loss of support through images such as small or uninterested crowds and inappropriate facial expressions such as frowning (Grabe and Bucy, 2009). Grabe and Bucy (2009) wanted to understand the general attitude of the photographs through breaking down the three frames, yet neither Verser and Wicks or Grabe and Bucy offered explanation on how the photographs could produce meanings for the audience.

Goodnow (2013) offered to explain as to how content of images could produce meanings for the audience. While analyzing Obama and Romney's Facebook Timeline photographs during the 2012 general election, a social semiotic approach was taken while analyzing the Ideal Candidate and Populist Campaigner frames from Grabe and Bucy's

research. Romney's photographs were collected starting on August 31st, 2012 and Obama's started on September 8, 2012. The collection of photographs ended on Election Day, November 6th, 2012. Goodnow analyzed the relationships between the actors in the image, the image and the producer and the image and the audience to reveal how images within Grabe and Bucy's (2009) schema worked to create meanings associated with the frame.

The semiotic analysis revealed that Romney often borrowed credibility in the images by associating himself with patriotic images or revered veterans whose credibility was established previously. Also, Romney made more eye contact with the camera seeking support directly from the viewer. Furthermore, Obama had assumed credibility as president. The semiotic analysis revealed that Obama used symbols of his credibility (Oval Office, White House hall) that were given by election and authority as given by other noted political figures (Powell and Biden) (Goodnow, 2013). Results also showed that the meanings of the images (candidate's Facebook timeline photographs) of the candidates could reveal more than the candidate intended.

Photographs have the ability to shape the political image, or persona, of a candidate. A candidate's desired image can be formed through various aspects in the photograph such as camera angle, activity, interaction, facial expression, issue versus image etc. The content in the photographs also create an overall attitude through the use of the three frames: the Ideal Candidate, the Populist Campaigner, and the Sure Loser. Additionally, the signs and symbols in the photographs work together to create meaning associated with the political image.

A Theoretical Background to Visual Imagery Interconnected to Texts

It hasn't been until recently that research has been conducted to show the affect of photographs in tandem with verbal texts. Emotion is primarily communicated via visual imagery (Coleman, 2004, p.459). Data reveals that when visual information, such as photographs, accompanies textual information there is greater level of influence in opinions and attitudes along with other benefits. Pictures presented through the media often provide important information processing that will be remembered longer than the texts.

Coleman and Wasike's (2004) content analysis examined the use of visual elements such as photographs and graphic elements in public journalism and traditional newspapers during the general election of 2000. Their paper linked Yankelovich's theory of public opinion with Paivio's dual-coding theory of how visual and verbal information can be pooled together. The team suggested a better theoretical model when the theory of public opinion includes the role of visual information in helping citizens come to better public judgments. Although Coleman and Wasike's research was applied (to the 2000 campaigning in public journalism) to newspapers, their research is still applicable to any medium where visual imagery accompanies verbal or textual information.

Coleman and Wasike (2004) deemed their research important because surprisingly visual elements are often overlooked in journalism. One could also argue that visual elements are often overlooked in communication as well. Coleman and Wasike (2004) proposed that both visual and verbal resources, according to dual-coding theory, have a more powerful and effective way of delivering a message. "Effective integration of visual information with verbal information is necessary to communicate the

same message and reinforce it" (Coleman, 2004, p.457). If effective implementations of visuals are included with public journalism, readers may be more likely to read, remember and think critically about the issues (Coleman, 2001).

Paivio's Dual-coding theory (1986) explains how people comprehend information from texts differently than they do from images. These two subsystems process information differently which results in different outcomes. "Verbal imagery is processed consciously, with the individuals' full awareness; visual imagery is not" (Coleman, 2004, p.459). Although people are aware of the intent of nonverbal messages, they do not perceive those messages "getting through" the way they are consciously mindful of the encoding of verbal messages. Moreover, the encoding of visuals adds an emotion and affective component to the message (Paivio, 1983). Affect and cognition work together to interact in important ways (Dillard & Meijnders, 2002; Dillard & Wilson, 1993).

Dual-coding theory (1986) says that visual information and verbal information are represented in two independent subsystems. These two subsystems are interconnected so information can be transferred between the two and also pooled. Paivio's theory has been extensively verified in experiments (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001) and also predicts that when presenting the same information in more than one modality (i.e. visually and verbally) cognitive processing of the information is enhanced, resulting in improved memory and elaboration or thinking about something (Coleman, 2001, p.459).

Although emotion is communicated primarily in imagery, such as photographs (Ekman, Friesen, & Ellsworth, 1972), visuals are not purely affective. Visual imagery

also may have an effect on the interpretation of verbal messages (Dillard & Wilson, 1993) and have been shown to stimulate careful message processing (Nabi, 2002).

For example, a person's emotional response to a visual image contributes to the judgments about a candidate above and beyond party identification and assessments of the candidate's character and issue position (Dillard & Meijenders, 2002). The dual-system processing perspective is compatible with the way emotion is processed as well as with cognition (Dillard & Meijenders, 2002; Lang & Friestad, 1993). Coleman and Wasike (2001) state the observation that emotions clearly affect information processing. They argue that since visual imagery is the primary way emotion is communicated, visual imagery should be added to the theory because when visual images are added to textual information they provide additional learning cues through signs and symbols (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). According to Coleman & Wasike (2004), "visuals in tandem with the verbal may offer a powerful new tool for achieving the goals of encouraging a vibrant, thriving democracy and improving the quality of public knowledge and opinion" (p.458). Visuals in tandem with the verbal may also offer a new tool for achieving a stronger message via social media.

Nonverbal Displays of Power

Research shows that nonverbal body language has a direct affect one's perceived level of power (Carney, 2012). Carney (2010) found that when people enact certain nonverbal poses of power the expression extends "beyond mere thinking and feeling, to physiology and subsequent behavioral choices" (p.1363).

Power has been displayed nonverbally throughout the animal kingdom. For example, a peacock fans his feathers and the chimpanzee holds his breath until his chest bulges (Carney, 2010). In the same way, humans also enact power nonverbally by making themselves bigger and more open. This nonverbal display of power and dominance are considered “alpha” (Darwin’s evolutionary selection) (Darwin, 1872/2009; de Waal, 1998). Power is also represented biologically through two key hormones: testosterone and cortisol (Carney, 2010). Research shows that nonverbal displays of power increase testosterone (the dominance hormone) and decrease cortisol (the stress hormone) (Carney, 2010).

People expect certain emotions and nonverbals from powerful and powerless people (Tiedens, 2000; Conway, 1999). Henley (1977) also claimed that nonverbal behavior is directly related to social power. A number of studies have focused on the social power construct and nonverbal cues. The social power construct has been defined multiple ways including personality dominance, status, dominance, leadership along with assigned, interactional and achieved power (e.g., Burgoon & Dunbar, 2000; Burgoon, Johnson, & Koch, 1998; Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985; French & Raven, 1959; Hall & Halberstadt, 1977; Kalma, Visser, & Peeters, 1993; Kemper, 2000).

Carney (2005) analyzed ordinary people’s expectations about specific nonverbal behaviors displayed by low and high powered others. She took an objective two-part approach to analyzing people’s expectations about nonverbal behaviors from low and high power individuals. In regards to distance data showed that high power individuals “initiate more hand shaking, engage in more invasive behavior, touch and remain at close distances” (Carney, 2005, p.114). Other studies have also looked at perceivers’

impressions of power based on viewing photographed or videotaped examples of these behaviors (e.g., Burgoon, 1991; Burgoon, Buller, Hale, & deTurck, 1984; Major & Heslin, 1982; Summerhayes & Suchner, 1978).

In the facial category, people of higher power were expected to have “less gaze aversion, less facial fear and less facial sadness. Conversely they were expected to display more facial disgust, more skill at using facial expression, more facial anger, more glaring, more mutual gaze, longer gazing and more looking while speaking” (p.114). Research is in agreement with Carney’s findings showing that impressions of viewed behavior suggests that more gazing is perceived as indicating more power (e.g., Brooks, Church, & Fraser, 1986; Burgoon et al., 1984; Burgoon & Le Poire, 1999).

The hand and arm category showed that individuals expect less self-touch and more gesturing. With regards to head movements, higher power individuals were projected to “engage in more upward tilting of the head, orienting head toward other and shaking head” (p.114). Within the posture category, power individuals were anticipated to have a more erect posture, lean forward more often, maintain an open body position while also orienting their body towards the other. Participants were also asked what behavioral qualities they expected in high power individuals. Results showed that they expected more self-assured expressions, more animation and broader gestures along with expressing intimacy in greeting others. Carney (2005) was surprised that the studies’ results were not gender specific and that the participants viewed both males and females to demonstrate the same nonverbal behaviors and skills associated with social power.

Data on presidential candidates displaying power nonverbally through Facebook photographs was nonexistent. However, Carney’s study provided a wide array of data

about nonverbal behaviors and skills of people who differ from high and low power positions that will be helpful for my research.

Conclusion

As media literacies increase, politicians are constantly challenged with how to incorporate visual imagery on their Facebook profiles. Given that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are constantly growing and that these platforms continue to increase in users, it is sensible to consider further exploration particularly as it is used by presidential candidates to display powerful photographs. There are many studies that list advantages for using social media for political use; however, there is currently more speculation than there is evidence to support the use of social media for political use. Furthermore, there is a lack of research relating specifically to the use of visual imagery on Facebook by Obama during his 2012 presidential campaign. One of the goals of the current project was to fill this gap by determining how Obama portrays his power through photographs on Facebook.

The remainder of this manuscript explains the methods used in the study, followed by the results, discussion and implications for incorporating visual imagery on political Facebook profiles.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into how Obama portrays his power through photographs on Facebook; therefore an approach utilizing qualitative research seemed to be the most appropriate and beneficial tactic to accomplishing this goal. More specifically, a social semiotics approach to analyzing the photographs offers a way to look at how the signs visually represent meaning. This research is not designed to directly specify the meaning of each photograph, rather to offer a critical analysis as to *how* the signs and symbols within the photograph could create meaning.

This chapter will present the following sections: social semiotics theory overview, composition (informational values, salience, framing), current research using social semiotics, collection of photographs and procedure.

Social Semiotics Theory Overview

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) took a fresh look at approaching the question of the visual. They wanted to treat visual forms of communication as seriously as linguistic forms had been treated because of the overwhelming evidence of the importance of visual communication and the problematic absence of research and questions concerning what visual images are actually communicating (Kress & VanLeeuwen, 1996, p.17).

Linguistic studies often analyzed the grammar to arrive at the meaning. Halliday (1978) argued that the grammar of a language is not a code or set of rules for creating correct sentences. Rather, he calls grammar a ‘resource for making meanings’ (Halliday,

1978, p.192). Images have a sort of grammar as well; Van Leeuwen took this idea and applied it to his research of social semiotics. He defined semiotic resources as:

The actions and artifacts we use to communicate, whether they are produced physiologically- with our vocal apparatus; with the muscles we use to create facial expressions and gestures, etc. – or by means of technologies – with pen, ink and paper; with computer hardware and software; with fabrics scissors and sewing machines, etc (Leeuwen, 2005, p.16).

Furthermore, the term ‘sign’ is used interchangeably with this definition. Signs are also actions and artifacts we use to communicate. For example, Van Leeuwen described a frown as a sign of disapproval and the color red as a sign of danger. Next, he described signs as the union of a signifier and a signified. A signifier is the observable form such as a certain color or a certain facial expression and the signified is the meaning such as danger or dis-approval (Leeuwen, 2005). The signifier (meaning) would not be possible without the sign (action/artifact) and the sign would not be possible without the signifier. For example, the sound or appearance of the word cat has no direct influence on it’s meaning. From a linguistics approach, the sound of the word cat (the sign) has been signified because of the social meaning ascribed (the signifier). In the same way from a visual approach, the color red (the sign) has a connotation of danger (the signifier).

Moreover, social semiotics looks at the observable signs and signifiers that have entered into the sphere of social communication. The theory suggests that social

processes form the signs and symbols within social contexts. Thus, signs and signifiers enter into a social context that may have rules or practices that regulate how they can be used. Therefore, social semiotics is not a ‘self-contained’ theory; it can only be applied to specific instances and problems in some other field (Leeuwen, 2005, p.14). This kind of interdisciplinarity is an essential feature of the theory in that it allows one to analyze signs and symbols from different points of view. This allows multiple perspectives for looking at *how* the signs and symbols could create meaning. Van Leeuwen makes his point very clear that social semiotics does not offer ready-made answers, rather, it encourages the audience to question, test, think independently and to arrive at individual conclusions (Leeuwen, 2005, p.14).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) also discussed the importance of a semiotic landscape (context or place) of the signs and symbols. The signs and symbols can only be understood by first looking at the landscape. The landscape includes both the historical development and the environment of all the other modes of communication, which surround the signs (Kress & VanLeeuwen, 1996, p.35). Just as the language and meaning of words change depending on the context they are in, signs and symbols hold different meanings depending on their context. As one observes the semiotic landscape of signs and symbols there is always an amount of interpretation involved in the process.

Interpretations of signs and symbols (semiosis) change depending on the context within which they are found. For example, the color red within one context might mean danger while in a different context might represent the Republican Party. This simple example shows the importance of recognizing the context as well as the subjective nature associated with ascribing meaning to a sign. Meanings are both objective and subjective,

according to the psychologist Gibson (1979) who wrote on the affordances of a potential use of a given object. Halliday also wrote on the concept of ‘meaning potential’ in relation to his study on linguistics and stated that meaning is subjective and needs to be studied in the social context. Van Leeuwen (2005) expanded upon Gibson and Halliday stating that the definition of ‘potential’ focuses on meanings that have already been introduced into society while the definition of ‘affordances’ brings in meanings that have not yet been recognized and that are waiting to be discovered (Leeuwen, 2005, p.18). Social semiotics stresses the notion that the context of signs and symbols need to be analyzed in the research procedures and that there is an objective and subjective nature to the interpretation of such things.

Composition

Although there is a level of subjectivity when analyzing photographs, Kress and Van Leeuwen offer some objective research on how composition determines ‘where things can go’ and how the positioning of the elements in a composition change the meaning. The composition of a photograph can represent relationships between subjects, places and things as well as the complex relationships between the subjects in the photograph and the audience viewers (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.175). Furthermore, composition can be broken down into three categories of analysis: informational values, salience and framing.

-Informational Values

The informational values relate to the placement of elements such as the subjects in a photograph. The relationships between subjects within a photograph can be broken down into two categories. A ‘non-transactive reaction’ is when the main subject in a photograph does not look directly into the camera. Rather, the subject looks out of the frame at something the viewer cannot see (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.176). A ‘transactive reaction’ in a photograph takes place when a secondary subject looks at the primary subject. For example, a younger boy (secondary subject) could look at his older sister (primary subject) who is looking off into the distance and out of the frame. This example would demonstrate both a transactive reaction as well as a non-transactive reaction. These two reactions can give different interpretations to the meaning of the photograph. For example, a non-transactive reaction directs the viewer to follow the gaze of the main subject who is looking out of the frame. Depending on the photograph, there could be multiple interpretations as to why the main subject is looking out of the frame. These reactions act as a starting point for how to analyze visuals. Discovering the meaning of the photograph is up to the rhetorician.

The depth of field is important to consider when analyzing the subjects’ compositions and transactive reactions because the depth affects the interpretation of the meaning. If two subjects are separated with the primary subject located at the forefront of the photograph and the secondary subject located behind in the depth of field this would be called a ‘long shot’. Long shots signify distance and different interpretations of the meaning can be made for the distance depending on the photographic elements. If the secondary subject moves closer to the primary subject the name changes to ‘medium

shot'. As the depth of field increases the amount of background blur also increases. This can affect the how the primary and secondary subjects are displayed and can also contribute to the salience of the subjects, which affect the interpretive process. The spatial positioning of elements can also have an affect on the interpretive meaning of the photograph. Elements that are polarized such as left and right, top and bottom and elements that are centered such as circular, triptych, center and margin affect how the viewer interprets the meaning (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.177).

Subjects and things placed heavily on the left signify something that is of older information and less prominent while subjects and things on the right signify new information and 'the message' of what the reader must pay particular attention to (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.180). For example, in a magazine article about Obama supporting his wife's Let's Move campaign might display a photograph on the left side of Michelle in the White House, while a photograph on the right side might be of Barack exercising in the White House. The left photograph would be what the audience is assumed to already know, which is that Michelle Obama is the First Lady who lives in the White House, while the photograph on the right would represent something new that the audience does not know and that is that Barack Obama likes to exercise. The left side of a photograph represents what is 'already given' and something that the viewer is already assumed to know while the right side represents the what is new, 'the message', the 'issue' (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.180).

Just as a subjects' horizontal positioning affects the interpretive process a subject's vertical positioning also contributes to the information values. The upper section of a photograph represents the "the promise of the product, the status of glamour

it can bestow on its users or the sensory fulfillment it can bring” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.186). While the upper half shows the audience what is, the lower half acts as a secondary location providing more information and pointing the audience to other sources of more knowledge. The upper section usually contrasts the bottom section and in some instances there is even a sharp horizontal frame to provide clear distinction of the two areas.

Similarly to the left and right evaluations of the given and new, the top and bottom show the ideal and the real. For something to be idealized it also has to be the most salient part. In contrast, for something to be real it needs to provide more specific information such as details, more “down-to-earth- information” and directions for action (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.187).

Photographs can also be analyzed by the center and margin. Central composition is relatively uncommon in Western visualization yet is prominent around other parts of the world (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.195). If a photograph focuses primarily on the center with other features surrounding along the margins the viewer interprets the center as the nucleus and the most important. The margins are considered dependent elements and usually have a consistency so that there is no sense of division. The margin of consistency prevents any form of given and new and/or ideal and real (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.196).

In Western visualization the center margin composition is not common although, just because the center is empty it continues to exist in “absentia, as the invisible (denied) pivot around which everything else turns, the place of the ‘divine ruler’” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.197). The denied, or invisible, center could be representative to how

society no longer relies on one divine ruler rather everyone has equal opportunity. This philosophy holds closely to the Western ideals of the people's equal chance to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

More modern magazines and newspaper layouts have started to use triptychs, yet they have been around since medieval times. Today, triptychs consist of a photograph on the left (given), a photograph on the right (new) and a photograph in the center which connects the two photographs and acts as a mediator (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.198). This form of polarization can also be displayed vertically. The vertical triptych displays the top photograph (ideal), the bottom photograph (real) and the center photograph which acts as a bridge between the top and bottom.

To recap the informational values of composition, one can look at the left/right composition of given and new, the top/bottom composition of ideal and real or the center/margin composition of most important element/supporting dependent elements. Generally the Western visualization looks at the space of left/right and top/bottom making the formation of a cross, which is a fundamental spatial symbol in Western culture (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.197).

-Salience

As discussed earlier, composition tells the viewer "where things can go". Just as the up/down, right/left and center/margin affects the composition, the salience also influences the viewer's interpretation of the image's meaning. Salience can affect the composition through creating a hierarchy of importance among elements (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.201). Kress and Van Leeuwen defined visual salience as:

The way in which the elements in a visual composition are made to attract the viewer's attention to different degrees because of the way they may be placed in the foreground, or background, and/or because of relative size, contrasts in tonal value or color, differences in sharpness and so on. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.177)

Oftentimes in multi-subject photographs one of the subjects will take on the more salient role. The more salient subject might have the most eye-catching element in the composition such as being positioned closest to the camera thus being the largest subject, having the sharpest focus or holding the greatest amount of light. Although, a subject does not *have* to display these features to be the most salient. For example, a salient subject might be placed in the back of the image yet the subject's clothing is light colored and has light on the face drawing the attention (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.176). The viewer is able to judge the salience on the basis of visual cues. Although the salience is not objectively measurable, there are certain factors that contribute to the *weight* of the most salient subject or object:

Size, sharpness of focus, tonal contrast (for instance, the contrast between strongly saturated and soft colors or the contrast between red and blue), placement in the visual field (elements not only become heavier as they are moved towards the top, but also appear heavier the further they are moved towards the left, due to an asymmetry in the visual field), perspective (foreground objects are more salient than background objects and elements that overlap other elements are more salient than the elements they overlap) and also quite specific cultural factors,

such as the appearance of a human figure or a potent cultural symbol (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.202).

These factors can be looked at and judged at how they *balance* within the photograph. The most salient subjects or objects will also hold the most weight and will usually pull the viewer's eyes either to the left, center, right, top or bottom of the frame. The use of salient objects creating balance can take on very different understandings of the photograph's message. For example, when a photograph is off-centered with the most salient subject on the right or the left one can look at the compositional meaning of old and new.

Salience also contributes to how the viewer understands the photograph's perspective. Viewers can relate to compositions in two ways, perspectively and non-perspectively. A perspective angle of a photograph is when the composition is viewed from the standpoint of the viewer. A non-perspective angle of a photograph is simply the opposite where the composition is not viewed from the standpoint of the viewer (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). A non-perspective composition allows for infinitely possible perspectives, which is coded from an internal point of view. In sum, the weight, balance and perspective of a photograph affect the salience and the overall composition.

-Framing

Composition can also be analyzed by looking at the framing of the photograph. Framing refers to the dividing lines created in the image that connects or disconnects elements of the photograph. For example, framing would occur if an image contained a vertical line formed by the right edge of a door with the light from outside shining on the

subject's face and the inside of the house, the depth of field, darkened. The vertical line from the door would frame the subject making everything else in the background less noticeable, less in focus and less important. Framing signifies elements that belong or don't belong together (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.177). Both the presence and absence of framing devices contribute to the message of the image.

Framing plays a significant role in the composition of a photograph because it has the ability to present different interpretations depending on the strength of the frame. The stronger the frame is within the photograph, the greater separation between the units of information. For example, a collage of many photos separated by strong lines and white spaces would be representative of a strong frame. Strong frames represent individuality and differentiation while a weaker frame or even the absence of a frame, represents group identity (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.203). Weaker framing can also send a message of togetherness, belonging as a single unit of information.

In conclusion, Kress and Van Leeuwen sought to look at *how* signs and symbol within photographs construct meaning. Meanings manifest through the composition, information values, salience and framing within photographs. Elements such as these create signs and symbols within semiotic landscapes to construct meaning within the world.

Current Research Using Social Semiotics

Goodnow (2010) examined a behind-the-scenes photo essay featuring Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama who were both up for the 2008 Democratic presidential campaign nomination. The photographs were published on February 18, 2008 in *Time*

magazine titled “The Great Divide.” On the assertion that news photographs can have an influence on the electorate, Goodnow (2010) conducted a close semiotic analysis of the article to discover any underlying visual bias.

By looking at the signs and symbols Goodnow (2010) realized that Clinton was displayed in black-and-white photos, studying papers, standing in the dark before giving a speech and doing a phone interview. In juxtaposition, Obama was shown with more positive affect cues such as cuddling with his wife, being active while playing soccer and smiling. The semiotic analysis revealed that the two candidates were portrayed differently creating a divide in the meanings associated with each photograph. Additionally, the disparities in the photographs may be a reflection of how the media and public already perceived each candidate.

Bowcher and Liang (2013) took a semiotic approach during their analysis of two entirely different statues of Chairman Mao: the first, a full figure statue completed in 1993, and the other, an immense bust completed in 2009. The statues were part of a tour organized for participants aiming to increase education about the history of the communist party, to remind citizens of the foundations of the current China, to instill national pride and to provide a spiritual and enlightening experience (Guolong Lvxingshe, 2011).

The authors stated that the statues were semiotic artifacts that represented the world as well as enacted social relations (Bowcher, 2013, p.6.). They interpreted the features of the Mao statues within their socio-historical-political context and showed how the statues reflected the aims of the Red Tour from a semiotic perspective. Signs and symbols within each statue were analyzed according to composition to create meanings.

For example, the analysis showed how the second statue on Orange Island, Changsha, held the salience because the sculpture stood alone and fixed on the island where residents on the opposite banks of the river were able to view it (p.20). The authors found that the two statues promoted a positive, nationalistic ideology that is encouraging and uplifting while aiming to instill a sense of hope and patriotism (Bowcher, 2013, p.27).

Collection of Photographs

This study was conducted in two parts. First, photos from Barack Obama's Facebook cover photo section were collected. Cover photos on Facebook take up the most space and set the backdrop for the personality of the page. Cover photos also allow the viewer to quickly see when the photo was uploaded. Photographs were selected ranging in date from June 27, 2012 up until the most recent photo uploaded on January 21, 2013. The dates were chosen because they covered half a years' worth of Facebook cover photos leading up to the election and the presidential inauguration. Out of the 26 photographs 10 were chosen for analysis, which was significant amount as it was 38 percent of the original collection of images. Many of the photographs were similar in regards to composition. Therefore, the 10 photographs chosen for this study were unique and provided ample data for analysis. They were chosen because they were different than the other photographs in regards to informational values, salience and framing. Throughout the course of this thesis I refer to the President and other identifiable subjects by their last name, i.e. Obama. In two of the images I analyze the First Lady, Michelle Obama. Consequently, to avoid confusion I refer to the First Lady as Michelle rather

than Obama. Images with text-based advertising or photographs with an overlay of text were not chosen for the study. Also, many of the photographs were similar in that they came from the campaigner frame. Consequently, only four of the campaigner frame images were chosen for this study. Once the photographs were selected, I applied social semiotic theory to determine potential meanings.

Procedure

Obama's timeline photos were analyzed according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotic theory. Three areas of compositional analysis provided the framework for the study: informational values, salience and framing. Each photograph was analyzed according to these three sections.

Social semiotic can help to reveal *how* photographs on Obama's Facebook Timeline work to create meanings associated with power or lack thereof. Social semiotic does not explain the concept of power; rather it gives the rhetorician the tools needed to analyze the photographs to reach interpretive meanings about power.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

Introduction

Facebook has carefully designed visual frames and spaces that allow users to input personal content to communicate to their friends and followers. As mentioned earlier, Facebook was originally designed as a colloquialism for the directory given to students at American universities. Today the network is available to everyone and there are one billion users on Facebook. However, the original intent of the network to connect people remains the same.

Furthermore, the ability to connect with people from all over the U.S., and the world, is intriguing to political campaigns. Additionally, the ability to connect with people without the restrictions to the physical presence of the person is a social phenomenon. With the increase of adult users on social networking sites, such as Facebook, campaigns have begun paying more attention to the medium as a means of distributing information and communicating to users. Facebook is unique in nature in that users can feel connected and in touch with the candidates themselves through posts such as status updates, videos and links to other sites and photographs. As stated earlier, visual imagery on social media is a relatively new area of research yet scholars promote the ability of photographs to have a number of benefits for political campaigns (Givson, Hester, & Stewart, 2001; Gibson & Zillmann, 2000; McKay, 2012; Trent, 2011). If that is true then how specifically can the photographs communicate meaning associated with power to the audience and why are photographs being used to influence this audience? In order to answer these questions Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) social semiotic analysis

will now be used to identify the signs and symbols within each of Obama's cover photographs, which will clarify how the photographs create meaning associated with power.

The analysis will be conducted in chronological order beginning with the earliest photograph moving to the latest. All the ten photographs were posted on the official Obama campaign Facebook as a cover photo. Each photograph will be analyzed according to the three areas of compositional analysis (informational values, salience and framing)

August 11, 2012

Informational Values

On August 11, 2012, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president and first lady standing in front of the White House separated by a crowd of people (<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.6815841748/10151099139791749/?type=1&theater>). The informational values in the photograph suggest that Obama is promoting a positive political image through various attributes. First, Obama is displayed participating in an activity with the crowd. The informational values in the photograph shows a transactive reaction where the primary subject, Obama, is looking away from the camera and the secondary subject, the crowd, is looking at the main subject. This transaction shows a relationship between Obama and the people. Furthermore, Obama is extending his hand out towards the crowd and making contact with a young man through with a handshake. The candidate is

demonstrating a dynamic behavior by shaking hands, which is considered a positive affect cue and contributes to a positive political image.

Second, Obama enhances a positive political image through his interaction with a large cheering crowd. The crowd is looking at Obama and Michelle with cameras lifted high documenting the occasion. Obama falls into Grabe and Bucy's (2009) Populist Campaigner Frame manifesting through the theme of mass appeal. As Obama faces the crowd he is standing tall and upright with his arms open and extended out towards the handshake. This open body stance is a nonverbal display of power and leadership and has been seen throughout the animal kingdom to represent dominance. However, Obama's body position towards the audience and back to the camera creates a divide between the audiences viewing the photograph. In the photograph Obama is shown promoting a positive political image but power appears to be low. The juxtaposition between the positive affect cues towards the crowd and low power pose of vulnerability suggests that Obama doesn't hold as much power as one might think.

The White House stretches across to the top perimeter of the photograph while Obama and Michelle are positioned at the bottom. The White House is a potent cultural symbol signifying prestige, honor and the highest level of leadership in the United States. Compositionally, the White House represents the ideals of America and the dwelling place of previous presidents who have been the face of leadership for the American people. Ironically, Obama is positioned underneath the White House and his face is not showing because his back is to the camera. However, the viewer sees the face of the people. Taken together, Obama is the realistic candidate to lead the American people because he has the people's needs and interests in the forefront of his decisions.

Salience

Obama is positioned in the front of the photo overlapping the crowd, which gives him a heavy visual weight. Because he is in the front of the crowd, he is the largest physical subject from the eyes of the viewer. The camera has a shallow depth of field with the focus on Obama and Michelle while the rest of the crowd, and White House, blur out the further back they appear. The blur creates a distance between Obama and the White House. Obama has visual weight because he is an important cultural figure and appears at the bottom of the photograph.

The White House is the largest object in the photograph and holds a strong visual weight because of its iconic symbolism for prestige and power. Together, Obama and the White House hold the strongest visual weight. However, Obama's back is to the camera creating a divide between the audiences viewing the photograph, therefore the White House holds the highest degree of salience. The distance between Obama and the White House suggest there is a separation of power. Obama holds a level of power in the photograph because of his position of leadership in the country. However, there is a juxtaposition with the White House, which historically has remained a symbol of power. If the White House represents the highest level of power, Obama must get through the people to get into the house of power. In the photograph, Obama is not the most powerful symbol and is shown in a vulnerable position.

Framing

Obama's back acts as the first frame as he and Michelle create a divider between the viewer and the people in the crowd. Obama and Michelle are displaying their vulnerability by showing the viewer what it feels like to see the crowd from their

perspective. The photograph is composed so that the viewer feels as though they are directly behind Obama and Michelle, seeing what they see and possibly feeling what they feel. The framing suggests that Obama is concerned with the needs of the American people in the photograph.

There is a white rope separating the crowd from the presidential couple. This acts as a second barrier and plays a significant role in the composition of the photograph because it represents a separation between the units of information. In the photograph, the units of information include the presidential couple, the crowd and the White House. The rope is a small symbol showing the weak separation between Obama and the people. Although there is a line of separation, Obama and Michelle are both reaching across the line to touch a person in the crowd. Michelle has both of her hands on the shoulder of an unidentified man while Obama has his arm extended over people in the crowd to shake the hand of a man a few rows back. The couple is breaking through the small barrier to show their relationship with the people. This gesture, which shows activity and interaction, contributes to a positive political image as mentioned earlier.

The given photograph shows Obama promoting positive affect cues through activity, interaction, hands, leadership, arms and distance. However, in regards to power, the White House actually holds the highest level of power and prestige in the photograph because of its historical and iconic symbolism for being a house of power. Obama is displayed as vulnerable with his back turned toward the camera. In addition, Obama is divided from the White House with the crowd of people. He is in close proximity to potential voters and even reaching out in a handshake creating a connection between himself and the crowd. This suggests that Obama is connecting with potential voters, but

must first get through the people before he can reach the powerful building of the White House.

August 22, 2012

Informational Values

On August 22, 2012, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president in the Oval Office petting his dog Bo (<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.6815841748/10151123981821749/?type=1&theater>). Obama is the only subject in the photograph. His chair is turned at a 90-degree angle away from his desk as he reaches out his left hand to pet his dog Bo. The focus of the photograph is on Obama's face and the surrounding landscape slowly blurs with the depth of field. The dog's face is positioned towards the camera with an open mouth and tongue hanging out. Obama's interaction with his dog Bo shows a more playful attitude that may have been unknown to the audience viewing the photograph. Obama is promoting positive affect cues with his cheerful expression, interaction with Bo and his attire of a suit and tie. The positive affect cues contribute to a positive political image in the eyes of the audience.

In addition, Obama appears to be attempting to connect with potential voters who have dogs. According to Pew Research (2010), a survey was conducted in 2010 that recorded 57% of people own pets while 43% do not. Amongst the percentage of dog owners, 85% think of their dog or dogs as members of their family (Pew Research, 2010). Obama has publically associated himself as part of the percentage of dog owners. Obama also appears to be promoting a positive political image and attempting to connect with the people rather than power.

In the photograph, Obama is seen located in the White House. The semiotic backdrop of the photograph is the Oval Office, the official office of the President of the United States. According to the official White House website, the office was originally built in 1909 by the architect Nathan C. Wyeth for President William Howard Taft. In response to a damaging fire in 1929, President Herbert C. Hoover rebuilt the office (White House). Just a few years after, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enlarged the West Wing adding the Oval Office. Since then, presidents have used the office as their primary place of work (White House).

Understanding the history of the Oval Office gives further understanding to the meaning and significance of the semiotic backdrop. The Oval Office has unique architectural features drawing from baroque, neoclassical and Georgian traditions, which have become “symbolic of the power and prestige of the Presidency in the minds of Americans and people across the world” (White House). There are features within the office that make it set apart in prestige such as the molding around the ceiling, the three large south-facing windows and the president’s desk. In the given photo, the molding and windows are not visible, but the office desk and paintings on the wall are notable signs signifying the location as the Oval Office. Presidents have the ability to change the office according to their personal style by choosing new drapery, furniture, carpet and paintings. The president often chooses the Oval Office as the backdrop for televised addresses to the nation because of its historical significance and symbolism of power and prestige (White House).

The semiotic landscape is significant and represents power. However, the backdrop in this specific photograph serves as a prop to promote a positive political

image to the American people. The evidence to back up this assertion is in the cropping of the photograph. If the campaign wanted to display Obama's power through borrowing it from the Oval Office I don't believe the photograph would have been cropped so tightly that the majority of it were hidden. The Oval Office is an important feature of the photograph but it doesn't hold the highest level of attention. Obama and his interaction with Bo hold the attention and the semiotic landscape is just a prop to promote a positive image to the American people.

The informational values suggest that Obama is promoting a positive political image by displaying attributes of playfulness, positive facial expression, dress and props. The visual cues also suggest that Obama might be trying to connect with dog owners in America. However, there is little evidence to believe that Obama is exhibiting power in the photograph.

Salience

The visual elements are positioned in a way to attract the viewer's attention Obama's interaction with his dog Bo. In the photograph, Obama holds the visual weight and salience for many notable reasons. First, he is positioned in the center of the frame and takes up the largest physical space in the photograph. Second, he holds the sharpest focal point, which contributes to the visual weight. Third, Obama is placed in the front of the photograph and is a potent cultural figure, which also contributes to the visual weight and salience (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). For reasons listed, Obama holds the salience in the photograph. However, his hunched over position makes his body appear small and enclosed. His body language is not promoting power. The salience draws attention not to Obama's powerful body stance, rather to his interaction with Bo.

Framing

In the given photograph the most salient subject, Obama, is positioned facing the right side of the frame at a 90 degree angle. Because he holds the most visual weight, the viewer's eyes look in the same direction to the right signifying the new information. In front of Obama is the family dog that is facing the camera with his mouth open and tongue hanging out. Obama's hand is petting the back of the dog as Obama grins with enjoyment. Taking the compositional factors together, the known information is the fact that Obama is working in the Oval Office while the new information is that he likes dogs and has one of his own.

In the photograph, ideally Obama would be working all day but in reality he enjoys taking breaks with the company of his dog. Through framing he is self-disclosing part of his identity by revealing new and real information. Obama's interaction with the dog displays a certain level of humanness and relatability to the American people.

In summary, this photograph does little to display Obama's power. His body is hunched over and made small showing a weak power pose. One might suggest that Obama borrows power from the Oval Office setting. However, I believe that the cropping does not flaunt the power of the Oval Office. Rather, the semiotic backdrop serves as a patriotic prop to draw the attention to Obama's interaction with Bo. In the photograph Obama is once again promoting positive attributes with interaction, dress, expression and props, which contribute to a positive political image.

August 23, 2012

Informational Values

On August 23, 2012, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president facing a little boy saluting him in a crowd (<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.6815841748/10151126416781749/?type=1&theater>). The informational values in the photograph display a transactive reaction where the secondary subject, the little boy, is looking at the primary subject, the president. The depth of field represents a medium shot where the spatial positioning of primary and secondary subjects is close in proximity. As Obama looks at the little boy, a handful of other people in the crowd display various emotions as they look towards Obama and hold up their phones to document the occasion.

Obama's back is to the camera and only part of his face is visible. The part of Obama's face that is visible is looking at the little boy and directs the audience viewing the photograph to look in the same direction. Obama is displaying positive affect cues through a number of attributes: intense gaze on the little boy, interaction by appearing before a cheering and attentive crowd, leadership as he is at the front of the crowd and the people look towards him, intimacy appearing in close proximity to the people and the little boy, attention as he appears to be the center of attention among the group and seriousness as his expression reveals a solemn and sincere look towards the young boy. Obama is blurred and hardly visible in the photograph therefore there are no nonverbal power poses noticeable.

Color has a grammar of its own and certain shades symbolically represent certain meanings. In the given photograph, the colors presented (red, white, blue and black) represent an iconic representation of the American Flag. There is speculation about the

meaning behind the colors of the American Flag. However, the House of Representatives published a book called "*Our Flag*" in 1989 which stated the original meaning of the colors (red, white and blue). In the book, Charles Thompson, Secretary of the continental Congress reported to the Congress on what the colors mean and stated:

The colors of the pales (the vertical stripes) are those used in the flag of the United States of America; White signifies purity and innocence, Red, hardiness & valour, and Blue, the color of the Chief (the broad band above the stripes) signifies vigilance, perseverance & justice (Our Flag, 1989).

As Obama faces the crowd and the little boy, only the front row of people's clothing is showing. The little boy saluting Obama is wearing a blue and white-checked button up. The next person in the line (from left to right) is the mother of the little boy. She is wearing a royal blue sports coat with a white blouse and necklace. Their colors represent the color of the Chief. This could symbolize Obama's beliefs that mothers and children are the leaders in the United States. The last person whose clothing is visible stands on the right of the frame. He is a middle-aged man wearing a black sports coat with a white undershirt and red tie. Obama is also wearing a black suit with a white undershirt and this symbolizes the seriousness of the occasion with the formal attire. At first glance, the colors appear to symbolically represent American patriotism. However, a social semiotic analysis of the signs and symbols reveals possible political beliefs of Obama. As mentioned earlier, Obama still displays positive attributes leading to a positive political image. However, I believe Obama wants the viewer of the photograph to notice that he is focusing on the American issues rather than his image in this photograph.

In addition, Obama is positioned on the far right of the photograph and takes up the entire right perimeter stretching to the top, making him the tallest element and representing the ideal. His head is tilted downward to the lower half of the photograph, which displays the little boy and the people surrounding him representing the real. Taken together, Obama is the realistic candidate to solve the real issues in America and to lead the country through another term of presidency.

Salience

In the photograph, the little boy holds the sharpest focus and is placed in the center of the frame. The little boy is wearing a blue and white-checkered button down shirt, which also adds to the weight of the salience because of the tonal contrast between the white and the blue pattern. He is positioned near the bottom and is being held by his father. In addition, all but two people in the photograph have their gaze on the little boy. The boy is overlapping the father as he salutes the president, a potent cultural symbol of respect and honor. The salute adds the most weight to the salience because of the cultural meaning associated with the symbolic sign. The symbolism and meaning of the salutation can be explained by looking at the framing.

Framing

In the photograph, Obama's body takes up the entire right side of the frame and he has directed his gaze to the little boy. A woman in white spans the left side perimeter of the photograph and also has her head turned towards the center of the frame. Both Obama and the woman are in equal distance to the camera and appear large in the frame. Together, they draw the attention of the viewer to the center of the frame to the little boy.

Various people in the crowd also are looking at the boy as he salutes the president. The symbolism of the boy saluting the president is significant. The salute is a symbolic representation and gesture of respect and homage especially made to a person when arriving or departing. One could interpret the little boy to be saluting Obama for his arrival or departure as president. The meaning is ambiguous in regards to power. However, one cannot deny the fact that the little boy is showing respect and appreciation to the president. In addition, perhaps the signs and symbols suggest that Obama is paying attention to the children and families in America. His eyes are on the youth and he is keeping their interest in mind throughout his campaigning.

In review, this photograph appears to show little power in regards to Obama. Rather, the focus is on the people. There are some attributes that contribute to a positive political image such as gaze, interaction, leadership, distance, dress and seriousness. However it appears that the signs and symbols show that the candidate is more focused on the American people and their issues rather than his own image. This is a contrast from the previous photograph that focused solely on promoting a positive political image of Obama.

September 4, 2012

Informational Values

On September 4, 2012, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president standing in front of a large cheering crowd and security guards

(<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.6815841748/10151147817396749/?type=1&theater>). In the photograph, Obama is placed in the

front of a crowd with his back facing the camera. The informational values suggest a transactive reaction where the crowd members are looking at Obama creating a candid moment captured by the photographer. His hands reach up into the air as he shakes reaching hands and arms from the large crowd in front of him. Obama is shown displaying various positive attributes: activity through his dynamic behavior of shaking hands with members in the crowd, interaction by appearing before a large cheering crowd, leadership as he is in front of the group of people who enthusiastically reach out their hands towards him, distance as he appears close to people and physically touching some of the people and also Obama appears to hold the attention from the crowd. As mentioned earlier, these positive affect attributes promote a positive political image. Obama's open body stance is the only nonverbal pose that displays any level of power. Obama's back is faced toward the camera, which represents vulnerability. This photograph was taken during his campaign and the elements suggest that Obama was more interested in promoting a positive political image to the people than promoting a high level of power.

Grabe & Bucy's (2009) research on political framing within photographs insinuates that Obama is partaking in the Populist Campaigner Frame with an emphasis on the mass appeal theme. Mass appeal is predominantly displayed by showing the candidate speaking to an enthusiastic and supportive, large crowd. In the photograph, Obama is standing in front of a large, enthusiastic and supportive mass of people with arms raised high and reaching out towards Obama. Obama is also reaching out towards the people and clasping their hands thus creating a connection between the people and himself. Nonverbally this displays a message of Obama's relationship with the American

people. Many of the people in the forefront of the crowd have animated faces displaying smiles, energy and excitement as they engage with Obama. The age of the people look like young adults. As Obama makes a connection with the American people the photograph suggests that he is putting an emphasis on the importance of the young adults rather than his power.

Obama is positioned with the security guards on the lower half of the frame, representing the real, while the people fill the upper half of the frame representing the ideal. There are five posters lifted high and spread evenly amongst the cheering crowd with Obama's campaign slogan written in capital letters: Forward. There is a large depth of field showing the magnitude of width and depth of the crowd. The depth of field shows a long shot where the crowd becomes more blurred the further back they reach (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). As mentioned earlier, the crowd represents mostly young adults. Taken together, Obama is the realistic candidate to lead the ideals of the young adults forward just as he has in the past. The composition tells the viewer of the photograph what Obama hopes to do if re-elected but does not show him possessing any high level of power.

Salience

Obama holds the salience in the photograph for many reasons. His light blue button up shirt contrasts against the dark clothing worn by the servicemen in the front of the photograph and the dark clothing worn by the people in the crowd. In addition, Obama's shirt shows areas that have been "blown out" by the sun. This takes place within the camera settings and usually is corrected. However, the "blown out" areas on Obama's shirt actually draw more attention to him and were subtle enough that they were

left in the photograph. Obama is seen overlapping the crowd as he extends his arms towards the people, adding to his visual weight. Obama is also a potent cultural figure, which also contributes greatly to his visual weight. For the reasons listed above, Obama holds the salience in the photograph and draws the most attention.

Framing

In the front of the photograph are five visible secret servicemen whose backs are facing the camera. The servicemen create a half-circle barrier between the viewer of the photograph and Obama. The five posters held high amongst the crowd members act as the second frame and are placed in a half-circle around Obama. Obama is placed in the center of the servicemen and the posters. One could interpret this to be a center-margin composition. The margins are considered dependent elements and have a consistency so there is no sense of division. In center margin composition, everything pivots around the center, which is the place of the “divine ruler” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). A possible interpretation for this could suggest that Obama is the center of servicemen and the people. If this interpretation were true, Obama would be displaying a high level of power.

In sum, Obama appears to be more concerned with creating a positive political image amongst the people than establishing his power. This would explain why his back is facing the camera creating a more vulnerable impression amongst potential voters viewing the photograph. Obama displays many positive affect cues including activity, interaction, leadership, distance and attention. While analyzing the framing, the signs and symbols hint that there might be central composition. If this interpretation were true, Obama would be displaying a high level of power. However, the evidence for center

margin composition is vague. The social semiotic analysis on this photograph reveals a candidate who is more concerned with connecting to the young people in American and moving them forward than he is about demonstrating a high level of power.

September 25, 2012

Informational Values

On September 25, 2012, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president standing at a podium with a concentrated gaze to his right (<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.6815841748/10151179933871749/?type=1&theater>). The photograph shows very few elements and appears to be rather simple. Obama takes up most of the frame as he stands at a podium with two speakers. The informational values suggest that he is partaking in a non-transactive reaction where the main subject in a photograph does not look directly into the camera. Rather, the subject looks out of the frame at something the viewer cannot see. There is a shallow depth of field with three other subject's heads visible but unidentifiable as they are entirely blurred out.

Directly behind Obama is a blue wall with two rows of white lettering. The top row has larger letters than the bottom row. I use the word lettering because the entire word is not present in the frame. Only seven letters are identifiable: RWA (top row), RACK (bottom row). Although the lettering does not draw overt attention to itself, the strategic angle of the camera makes the words almost identifiable to anyone who is familiar with the 2012 political campaigning slogan. One assumes the letters fall in line with Obama's campaign slogan at the time: Forward and Barack. There is a subliminal

but intentional message behind the camera angle with the letters that Obama is what will move the country forward. This subliminal message hints at Obama's power but is not blatantly exposed. There are other visual cues that suggest this meaning behind the photograph.

It is clear that Obama is standing outside in the elements because of the visible raindrops across the frame of the photograph. There are also raindrops on Obama's face and a dampened shirt from what looks to be a heavy downpour. His button-down white shirt is slightly transparent exposing his undershirt and skin. This discloses a more vulnerable side of Obama as the viewer has seen more than one normally would in better weather conditions. The weather conditions are not ideal, yet Obama still stands. One might interpret the metaphorical symbolism in the photograph as Obama being the realistic candidate to stand, endure and lead the country forward in all conditions.

In the given photograph, Obama is positioned slightly to the right of the center margin and takes up the most space vertically representing the new and the ideal. The unidentifiable people line the bottom perimeter of the frame. Taken together, Obama is the idealistic candidate to lead the country forward. However, Obama doesn't appear to be exhibiting the stance that one might take in a high power position. Rather, the elements suggest he is humbly asking the audience for a re-election. The evidence for this assumption is in the nonverbal body language and the attire Obama is wearing. Obama is partaking in a few powerful poses including a concentrated gaze as he looks sharply to the right, a prominent facial expression of seriousness as he looks towards the future, and a tall open body stance. However, his shirt is slightly transparent giving an impression of vulnerability, which counteracts against the powerful nonverbals making

them weaker in meaning. For these reasons, it appears that Obama is communicating subtle signs of power yet he recognizes the vulnerability of the election process.

Saliency

Obama is contrasted against a stark blue background with white lettering. His light blue shirt appears almost white and is contrasted nicely against the background and also against his skin. He is in sharp focus and is positioned against a blurred background. There are not any other subjects in focus and there are not any other large objects in the photograph. Observably, Obama holds the strongest visual weight and the saliency.

Framing

There are 4 unidentifiable people's heads behind Obama who are completely blurred out and line the bottom of the photograph creating a strong base frame. Obama is positioned in front of the people and slightly to the right of the center margin. This might contribute to the metaphorical symbolism that the people need to get behind Obama and let him lead the country forward. This meaning matches and adds to the subliminal messaging with the letters that Barack will move the country forward.

Additionally, the two microphones line the center of the photograph and create a strong dividing line. Obama is standing directly behind them with equal proportions of his body on either side of the microphones. The microphones start from the bottom of the photograph and stop just below Obama's face causing the audience to follow the lines and stop at Obama's face as well. The framing in the photograph suggest that Obama's face, that is looking to his left and to the future with seriousness, is the most important element in the photograph.

In brief, the photograph is a simple depiction displaying Obama's subtle hints at power through nonverbal as well as his vulnerability in the campaign with the transparency of his shirt from the rain. In addition, the photograph sends a subliminal message through the background lettering of Obama's campaign slogan: Forward. The semiotic analysis revealed that Obama is asking for more power in humility through a presidential re-election rather than demanding it by displaying himself as solely a powerful figure.

October 4, 2012

Informational Values

On October 4, 2012, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president speaking to a large mass of people at Wisconsin University (<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.6815841748/10151194151741749/?type=1&theater>). In the photograph Obama is partaking in a non-transactive reaction with the viewer, as he is not looking directly into the camera. Rather, Obama is standing on a podium and looking into the frame at a massive crowd. Directly behind the field is Bascom Hall, Wisconsin's most famous building (Bascom Hall). The crowd is so massive that no one stands out from one another. The people blend to make one body of people and act together as the secondary subjects. The crowd is displaying a transactive reaction as they (secondary subjects) look towards Obama (primary subject) who is looking off into the distance. Obama is the tallest human subject in the photograph, which represents his dominance amongst the people. However, the viewer can hardly see Obama's face and his body language does not

demonstrate powerful poses or gestures. In addition, Obama is blurry in the photograph. I believe this suggests that the viewer's focus should not be on Obama.

Obama displays a few positive affect cues such as leadership as he appears to be the leader in front of the large group of people, posture as he stands tall and upright, speech as he is addressing a large audience, props as multiple American Flags appear in the photograph as patriotic symbols, and attention as the candidate appears to be the center of attention amongst the people. Although the candidate displays many positive attributes, which contribute to his political image, it appears as though Obama wants the focus of the photograph to be on the issue of higher education instead. This interpretation is further demonstrated through his compositional positioning.

Obama is positioned in the bottom right corner of the photograph representing the real and the new. Opposite, the upper left corner displays Bascom Hall, which is the largest object in the photograph representing the ideal. The Hall reminds the viewer that the opportunity to receive higher education is something to strive for. The symbols also reveal meaning that Obama believes he is the real candidate to help Americans have a better education system. The Hall reaches horizontally across the top of the frame taking up about half of the photograph. On the very left corner of the building (and photograph) hangs a large American flag. The bottom of the building has six smaller flags waving in the air. Taken together, Obama is the realistic candidate to lead the country in the ideals of higher education and leadership in the country. Furthermore, the composition reveals that Obama wants the viewer to understand his seriousness towards the issue of higher education.

In the photograph Wisconsin University acts as the semiotic backdrop. The college is best known for their ability to incorporate new media technologies for instructional learning into the classroom (Bascom Hall). The crowd stands on the grass field located directly in front of Bascom Hall, the historic building that holds the most prestige on campus. It is located at 500 Lincoln Drive, on top of Bascom Hill. The building is the oldest on campus dating back to 1857 (Bascom Hall). The semiotic landscape also suggests that Obama views higher education as an important subject to address.

Salience

The most eye-catching element in the composition is Bascom Hall. The Hall is the largest and sharpest object in the photograph and holds the most tonal contrast. For example, the Hall is made of brown stone with white pillars. In between the pillars hang three collegiate banners holding symbols that represent the University's ideals such as President Lincoln (the building is placed on Lincoln street) and the college flag, which contribute to the building's visual weight. The banners display the school colors, gold, white and blue. There is a strong contrast between the bright red and dull blue in the banners. The strongly saturated colors next to the soft white pillars draws the viewer's attention and contribute to the visual weight and salience of the building. The colors also signify those of the United States which holds a visual weight of its own.

In the photograph Obama is in the front and Bascom Hall is in the back. In regards to perspective, usually objects that are in the front are the most salient. Although, in this case, Bascom Hall holds more visual weight than Obama because of the patriotic symbolism on the building, such as the American flag and national colors, and the potent

cultural figure of President Abraham Lincoln. Furthermore, the most salient object is Bascom Hall. This also contributes to the theme that Obama wants to draw the viewer's attention to the issue of higher education.

Framing

There is only one strong line in the photograph and that is Bascom Hall. The hall lines the top left portion and acts as the backdrop to the photograph. The rest of the photograph is filled with the crowd of people and Obama in the front, right and bottom half. The absence of strong framing sends a message of togetherness and group identity. This framing could send the message that higher education can only be improved if the American people come together as a single unit to help solve the issues.

In review, the informational values show subtle attributes that contribute to a positive political image. The signs also suggest that Obama is the dominant human figure in the frame because he is positioned higher than the people in the crowd. However, Obama is blurry and it appears there is a lack of power being displayed in the photograph. The focus of the photograph is on Bascom Hall, which communicates that he wants the viewer to focus on the issue of higher education rather than on him.

October 27, 2012

Informational Values

On October 27, 2012, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president speaking to a large mass of people during the presidential campaign at nighttime on an airplane runway

(<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.681584>)

1748/10151234423071749/?type=1&theater). The photograph presents a large depth of field where the crowd members are facing towards a podium, with backs to the camera, and Obama on the podium far off in the distance. This photograph has been previously published without the blurred edges. It appears that the blurred edges have been added in post-process. Obama is positioned over the crowd on a small stage signifying dominance amongst the crowd. This suggests subtle hints of power. However, Obama is small in the frame and overpowered by Air Force One located directly behind him. In addition, Obama demonstrates many positive affect cues such as activity through his dynamic behavior of speaking in front of the large crowd, hands through his energetic gesturing, props as the Air Force One Jet takes up the back of the frame, interaction and leadership as he appears before an enthusiastic crowd and speech as he is addressing a large audience. These attributes suggest that Obama is concerned with promoting a positive political image to the people but shows little in regards to sending messages of power.

Obama is clearly taking on the Populist Campaigner Frame focusing on the theme of mass appeal as he appears in front of the large enthusiastic crowd (Grabe and Bucy, 2009). The crowd takes up the entire lower half of the photograph. With both the left and right sides blurred out the viewer is directed to the center of the photograph. In the front center the crowd's backs are towards the camera and many of the people's hands are raised in the air waving and holding their phones and cameras. The photograph nonverbally shows an enthusiastic crowd supporting Obama in his campaign speech. The display of leadership and authority in front of the crowd could be interpreted as a sign of power. However, Obama is blurry and small in the frame, which counteracts the idea that Obama is displaying power.

Air Force One takes up the most physical space in the photograph and is located at the top left of the frame. The enthusiastic crowd lines the bottom half the photograph and Obama stands between the two on a podium. Taken together, Obama is the connection between the real people at the bottom and the ideals of the United States represented by Air Force One. Furthermore, the airplane is a vehicle that takes people from where they are to where they want to go. The composition of the elements suggests that Obama is metaphorically inviting the people to move away from where they are and to go with him to a new place. The new place is ambiguous and unclear, but the idea of change fits with his campaign slogan: Forward.

Salience

Air Force One holds the most visual weight for a number of reasons. The jet is the largest object in the frame and is colored with a bright white and blue against a dark background. The strong contrast of the light jet against the black background adds to the visual weight and draws the most attention. In addition, the jet is a national symbol of prestige and power thus drawing attention even more. Perhaps Obama is borrowing credibility from the recognized symbol of the Air Force One, which is known to carry people of power and prestige. However, Obama may be using the jet to send a metaphorical message to the American people. The jet represents a moving vehicle that flies through the air at very fast speeds. As mentioned earlier, an airplane takes people from where they are to places they want to go. The metaphorical significance in the photograph suggests that Obama wants to take the American people to places they want to go if elected another term of presidency. The salience of the Air Force One reveals what Obama hopes to do if re-elected. However, it says very little about his power.

Framing

There are very few dividing lines and frames within the photograph. The jet is placed in the back creating a backdrop for the photograph while Obama and the crowd stands in the front of the photograph. The jet creates the only strong horizontal line visible. As mentioned in the previous photograph, the absence of strong frames sends a message of unity and togetherness. One might interpret this to mean that Obama wants the American people to come together before him and support him.

To recap, the informational values show Obama promoting a positive political image to the people while also subtly hinting at displays of power with his high position and dominance above the crowd. However, the salience and framing suggest that Obama is more concerned with communicating what he will do if re-elected. This is best displayed through Air Force One, which is the most salient object in the photograph and metaphorically invites the people to join him for the ride as he takes the American people to a new place.

November 8, 2012

Informational Values

On November 8, 2012, the day after Obama's re-election into the Presidency, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president, First Lady, Vice President Joe Biden and people hugging at the campaign headquarters in Chicago (<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.6815841748/10151260678086749/?type=1&theater>). The photograph was posted right after Obama was re-elected for a second term of presidency. The photograph displays a non-

transactive reaction of Michelle Obama with her hands raised high as she is centered in composition and looks out of the frame rather than directly into the camera. Just to her left, Obama displays a transactive reaction where he is looking to the primary subject, Michelle, also with his hands raised up. Behind Michelle and Barack are two unknown people hugging in the lower right corner of the photograph. The males face is visible to the camera and displays an animated smile. The unknown people are slightly blurred which signifies a large depth of field and distance between the people and Obama. The depth of field exhibits a 'long shot' where the spatial positioning of actors within the image is separated by space. On the right perimeter of the photograph Obama is holding hands lifted high in the air with Joe Biden who is mostly cut out of the frame.

All five subjects are placed to the right of the frame signifying what the viewers must pay particular attention to. In the given photograph, there is one overarching message of power being displayed nonverbally in three different ways: Barack's relationship with his wife, his relationship with Joe Biden, and his relationship with the American people.

The first message is displayed nonverbally showing Obama's respect and devotion to his wife. His body positioning is slightly turned towards Michelle and his right arm is wrapped around her almost connecting them at the hip. The proxemics shows hardly any space between the husband and wife signifying a close bond between the two figures. Michelle is an influential woman who has accomplished many things during her reign as the First Lady. She holds an ethos and power on her own that many women in the United States admire and aspire to. Obama is displaying his power through a double unit of male and female togetherness rather than as an individual single unit.

The two are enacting nonverbal displays of power by making themselves bigger and more open. This display of openness and power has been displayed throughout the animal kingdom and is considered “alpha” according to Darwin’s evolutionary selection (Darwin, 1872/2009; de Waal, 1998). In regards to distance, data shows that higher power individuals engage in more invasive behavior such as higher levels of touch and close distances with others. Obama has his arm wrapped around Michelle’s waist, which nonverbally contributes to their message of power as an inseparable unit.

Obama also is displaying a message of togetherness with Joe Biden, the Vice President, through his nonverbal display of touch. Just to the right of the frame Obama is clasping Biden’s hand making himself even more open and exposed towards the viewer. The hand/arm category shows that higher power individuals are expected to initiate more hand shaking, engage in more invasive behavior, and to use larger gestures (Carney, 2005, p.114). As Obama clasps Biden’s hand the two are nonverbally displaying their power through their physical touch. Also, their large gesturing of hands raised in the air signifies their victory and power together.

Obama’s relationships with the unidentified people in the background tell a different story. As mentioned earlier, the two people hugging display a long shot and are blurred out due to the depth of field, which signifies distance between Obama and the people. One of the individual’s faces is visible and turned towards the center of the frame pointing towards Michelle and Obama. The man’s facial expression is animated as he smiles in excitement. The two individuals take up the least amount of space in the photograph and are located at the bottom right of the frame. They appear to be in support of the re-election thus giving Obama a positive political image.

Obama's relationship with the people represents a contrast between the ideal and the real. In the photograph, Obama is not looking at the two unidentified people, yet they are looking at him. This could be a metaphorical representation displaying how the people look to Obama for leadership and power. While Obama is located at the top of the photograph symbolizing the promise and glamour of his position, the people rest at the bottom of the photograph, symbolizing that Obama's power is given from the people. This falls in line with Obama's campaign slogans which use words of togetherness: together we can, we cannot walk alone, our time for change.

The photograph also displays a relationship between the President and patriotic symbolism. Red, white and blue confetti drop from the ceiling and cover the frame. Also, American colored banners hang and take up almost the entire left side of the photograph. Grabe and Bucy (2009) state that candidates will often choose a visual strategy that incorporates patriotic symbols to show a loyalty and connection between the candidate and country. Using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) schema, the country's patriotism is a given. Moreover, Obama can represent the new direction of the United States. Obama is placed in the upper half of the photograph, representing the ideal, while the American banner is situated towards the bottom, signifying the real. When looked at together, Obama is seen as the ideal candidate to lead the country.

Salience

The viewer is immediately attracted to Michelle and Barack Obama because they physically take up the largest amount of space in the frame. Michelle and Barack are the sharpest point of focus in the frame and also display a contrast between strongly saturated and soft colors. For example, the contrast between Michelle's soft red dress and

Obama's bright blue tie draw the audience's attention and interest and contribute to their salience. In the photograph, Michelle and Barack are placed in the front and are physically closer to the camera than the subjects who are blurred out in the background. The camera angle also points upward which causes the subjects in the photograph to appear larger. However, Michelle's full face is toward the camera whereas only half of Obama's face is visible because he has his head turned towards the left. For that reason, I believe Michelle is the most salient subject in the frame. A possible interpretation for this could suggest that Obama values women's rights and metaphorically Michelle represents the women in the world.

Framing

As seen in some of the previous photographs, there are no strong dividing lines visible in the frame. This sends a message of togetherness between the subjects. In the photograph, Michelle, Barack and Joe Biden are seen as one unit raising their arms in power.

In sum, this photograph marks a significant change in power from the previous 7 photographs. The previous 7 photographs showed Obama to be focusing on his political image and the issues of the American people. The informational values suggest that Obama is displaying his power nonverbally through a wide open stance, arms raised high, strong facial expression and interaction with Michelle and Joe Biden. Additionally, Obama displays his power nonverbally through three different relationships: Michelle, Biden and the American people. Furthermore, the salience and framing suggest a message of togetherness and unity of subjects displaying the three people (Barack, Michelle and Biden) making up one unit of power together.

January 2, 2013

Informational Values

On January 2, 2013, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president, vice president and a security guard in the middle of a hallway in the White House (<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.6815841748/10151339243791749/?type=1&theater>). In the given photograph, the secondary subject is looking at Obama while also placing a hand on the upper left of his suit creating a point of contact and connecting the two figures together. This small gesture unites the two figures together thus signifying a relationship between the two. Their closeness in proximity sends a nonverbal message of power because two is stronger than one. Other nonverbal displays of power given from the president include: a mutual gaze, dynamic and animated smile, orientation of head toward Biden, erect posture and leaning forward, open body stance while also orienting body towards Biden and expression of intimacy in the greeting of Biden. The informational values show Obama displaying nonverbal poses of power thus making him appear as a powerful individual.

The third subject, a security guard, in the depth of field is slightly blurred and also looking at the primary subject, Obama. Subsequently, the eye movement follows the power of the actors and represents the strength of their positions within the triangle. The actors in the photograph are conveying authority and power to Obama creating what Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) call a vector of presentation.

In this photograph, the elements transmit values through their placement. The informational values within the photograph display Obama as the tallest figure followed

by Biden and finally the security guard. In the photograph the compositional positioning at the top of the frame suggests that Obama represents the face of the country, the glamour and the promise of power. He takes the highest position in the photograph symbolically representing his high position of power in the United States government as president.

The lower half of the photograph shows an important, often underrepresented and less glamorous area within the government: Vice President Biden and the anonymous security guard. The Vice President's face is turned away from the camera and positioned towards Obama signifying his submission and authority to the president. The security guard's face is also looking towards Obama in compliance.

The elements placed on the left and right also have different informational values. In the photograph, Obama and Biden are linked together with Biden's arm touching the president and are placed on the left side of the photograph. They take up the largest space and are presented in the clearest focus. They are the dominant figures and immediately draw the attention.

The anonymous security guard stands on the right of the photograph in the depth of field, blurred out and looking at Obama and Biden. The informational values suggest that Obama and Biden represent the given while the security guard represents the new. The viewer expects the President and Vice President to be together and interacting within the White House. Although, the audience might forget that there is security everywhere watching every move. The message in the photograph might suggest that the audience should pay particular attention to the security officers. With an increase in awareness surrounding topics of national security, the meaning might hint that security officers are

always just a few steps away, watching the government and the citizens. Additionally, the security guard is displaying a serious facial expression, which contrasts with Obama's lively and animated smile. This juxtaposition further draws the attention to Obama.

Salience

People expect certain emotions and nonverbals from powerful and powerless people (Tiedens, 2000; Conway, 1999). As mentioned earlier, Obama displays many power nonverbals. However, by examining Obama's power nonverbals further one can assess the level of salience within the frame. In the photograph, Obama and Biden enact different displays of power through their nonverbal body language, which contributes, to their visual weight.

Obama and Biden are standing at a close distance while Biden is initiating physical contact with his right hand to the upper half of Obama's jacket. Higher power individuals remain at closer distances, initiate more physical contact and engage in more invasive behavior (Carney, 2005, p.114). Biden is displaying his power through his physical contact with the president. Obama is displaying his power by physically remaining at a close distance and giving a big smile as he accepts the physical contact from Biden. In the facial category, people of higher power are expected to have less facial fear, less facial sadness, more mutual gaze and more skill at using facial expressions (p.114). In the photograph, Obama and Biden are smiling, showing low levels of facial fear and sadness, which correlates with higher levels of power. They are also displaying a mutual, un-intimidated gaze towards each other, which also correlates with higher levels of perceived power. More gazing is perceived as indicating more

power (e.g., Brooks, Church & Fraser, 1986; Burgoon et al., 1984; Burgoon & Le Poire, 1999).

Within the posture category, power individuals are anticipated to have more erect posture, lean forward more often, maintain an open body position while also orienting their body towards the other. In the photograph, Biden's back is faced towards the camera and his feet are firmly planted facing towards Obama. The president has a more erect posture, is leaning forward while maintaining an open body position and looking at Biden. His feet are also facing the camera, as his body is completely open to the audience viewing the photograph. One can assume that Biden's positioning away from the camera is a more vulnerable stance and his body posture is in submission to the president's. In contrast, Obama's posture represents nonverbal body language associated with power through his open body position and erects posture.

Certain behavioral qualities also are expected in high power individuals. Self-assured expressions, more animation, broader gestures and expressing intimacy in greeting others represent nonverbal displays of power (Carney, 2005). In the photograph, Obama's expression is animated as he smiles in sincerity towards Biden. Obama's expression demonstrates nonverbal behavior associated with social power.

The visual cues suggest Obama is the most salient figure in the photograph. The nonverbal displays of power show Obama as the most authoritative and dominant figure while Biden is displayed as more vulnerable and submissive. The nonverbal displays of power contribute to the visual weight because of the way the subjects are placed in the photograph. Obama has the most eye-catching element in the composition because of his nonverbal displays of power, openness, gaze and light on the face drawing attention. He

is also an important cultural figure, which contributes to the visual weight and salience (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p.202).

Framing

The dividing lines in the photograph reveal what belongs and what doesn't belong. For example, the photographer took a wide-angle photograph leaving in the surrounding walls visible to reveal that Obama and Biden were standing in a hallway in the White House. The walls on the left and right create strong vertical lines forming a frame around Obama and Biden in the hallway. Furthermore, a light brown and gold picture frame hangs directly behind Obama and borders his head. The picture frame is shiny and light colored contrasting against Obama's dark skin. A possible interpretation could be that the frame draws attention to Obama and communicates a message about his importance. Additionally, there is another hallway to the right where the security guard stands. The vertical lines from the wall create a separate compartment distinguishing that the security guard does not belong in the same space as Obama and Biden.

In summation, the informational values display Obama, Biden and the security guard standing in a triangle formation. This vector of presentation reveals the strength of their positions within the triangle while showing that Biden and the security guard are giving authority and power to Obama. The body language shows Obama to be enacting the most powerful poses. Furthermore, Obama holds the salience in the photograph because of his powerful body language and open body stance. Additionally, the lines of the picture frame also draw the attention to Obama. For the reasons listed above, Obama clearly is communicating his power to the audience viewing the photograph.

January 21, 2013

Informational Values

On January 31, 2013, the Obama campaign posted a photograph of the president in the middle of a meeting in the White House (<https://www.facebook.com/barackobama/photos/a.10150601538561749.382175.6815841748/10151369410101749/?type=1&theater>). This image had been previously published in response to comments made by Clint Eastwood. While the original context is more complicated, my purpose here is to analyze the ways in which power is depicted just from the signs and symbols in the photographs. The photograph displays a non-transactive relationship where the primary subject is looking into the frame, revealing the back of his head, rather than gazing at the audience. As mentioned earlier, Obama is communicating vulnerability as his back is to the camera. The audience is unable to distinguish what the main subject, Obama, is looking at although it's visible that his head is slightly tilted to the right. How Obama is positioned towards the meeting could be a reflection of how he wants to be perceived as being on an equal level to the audience and exposing vulnerability. However, in his vulnerability his power is still displayed through the interplay between actors within the composition, the salience of political symbolism and the positioning of Obama through framing.

There are two triangles within the photograph. The first is on the right between the two women and Obama. The second is on the left between the two men and Obama. The background actors are blurred out which displays action and busyness within the meeting. Obama is located in the center of the frame, physically takes up the most space

in the photograph and is the connector between the triangles on his right and left sides. Obama displays his power as the connecting unit between the two groups of people.

One of the women on the right has her head turned looking towards Obama and the other woman's head is also slightly turned towards him. With the women's heads and eyes facing towards Obama, the actors are taking part in a vector that Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) call presentational because the photograph's story displays the people doing something to or for each other. This photograph shows the women giving nonverbal authority and power to Obama. Counter intuitively the men on the left of Obama are looking down at their notes. The left side of the photograph tells a different narrative than the right.

The composition reveals that the men on the left represent where things have been and the women on the right represent where things are going. With the increasing awareness of women's rights along with Obama's historic stance to support women in the workplace, the photograph's story suggests that women are giving authority and power to Obama while the men are not. Obama's head is also slightly tilted towards the right (to the women), perhaps representing where the future is headed.

The vertical positioning of actors also affects how the photograph creates meaning. The upper half of the photograph consists of two paintings of past presidents with the top of Obama's head placed between. The lower half of the photograph consists of the two women and two men who are visible and taking part in the meeting. The top part of the photograph shows Obama amongst the line of past presidents, which is the ideal position to hold and the highest level of power one can bestow. The bottom half of the photograph displays the real people who collaborate and contribute to the president's

knowledge and decisions. The interplay between the actors in the frame all point towards the upper center of the photograph displaying a narrative of power towards the president.

Salience

The elements in the photograph attract the attention to the center character of the frame, Obama. There is a long depth of field to the subjects sitting across the table and the subjects are blurred out. Everyone is sitting in similar brown leather chairs with gold trim around the edges although the audience has no choice but to be drawn to the back of Obama's chair because it physically takes up the most space in the photograph.

The president's chair and upper half of head create the central point of the photograph because they are the largest and most saturated objects in the frame. Furthermore, the upper half of the chair has a shiny gold nameplate that reads: *The President January 20, 2009*. Salience contributes to the composition by creating a hierarchy of important elements in the photograph. There are many factors that contribute to the visual weight of the most salient object in the photograph, which is the president's nameplate.

The nameplate is the smallest object in the photograph although it is the element with the sharpest focus. It has a contrast of black text against a shiny metallic gold border, which juxtapose attractively with the typography. Elements become heavier as they are moved towards the top of a frame and in this photograph the nameplate carries more weight because it is placed in the upper half of the frame (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). The nameplate is also located in the front of the photograph and the structure of the chair appears to overlap the background elements, which are blurred. Cultural factors, such as the appearance of a human figure or potent cultural symbol, also

contribute to the salience of a subject or object. The fact that Obama is sitting in the chair of the nameplate adds salience just because of his appearance.

Additionally, this photograph was uploaded as a cover photo on January 21, 2013 exactly four years and one day after the presidential inauguration. The historic significance of timing along with the factors that contribute to the weight of the symbolic nameplate and date suggest that the hierarchy of power within the photograph belongs to the president.

Framing

In this photograph there are dividing lines which display a distinction between Obama and the other people. Two paintings hang at the top half of the frame. The one on the left is of President George Washington while the painting on the right is unidentifiable because of the blur. Each painting is framed by an arch molding. This collage of paintings hangs within the strong frames of the arch moldings and provides a white space as a backdrop. President Obama's head sits between the two arch moldings and paintings almost on equal plane with the past president's heads. The arch moldings frame Obama's head perfectly showing that he belongs together with the past presidents. In the photograph, the arch moldings, white wall space and paintings send a message of togetherness and belonging as a single unit of presidents. Consequently, as the framing suggests Obama belongs in the line of elements it implies that the other actors on the lower plane do not belong.

To review, the informational values suggest Obama is revealing vulnerability because his back is to the camera. However, his power is also displayed through the triangle (vector of presentation), as he is the connecting figure between the two groups of

people on either side. The compositional positioning showed Obama as the tallest figure in the meeting communicating that he is the ideal candidate to lead the country. Additionally, the framing of elements showed Obama's head amongst the line of presidential paintings. This revealed that Obama belongs together with the past presidents and that the other human figures in the photograph do not, thus signifying his power amongst the people.

To conclude this chapter, the social semiotic analysis revealed that the pre-election photographs promoted a positive political image and focused on the issues that the American people were facing while also encouraging solutions. However, the pre-election photographs revealed that power wasn't as important. In contrast, the post-election photographs showed a transition in Obama's nonverbal body language revealing that power was more important. Furthermore, Obama was shown at the top of the frame displaying dominance over the other subjects in the photograph.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Introduction

As media literacies increase politicians are constantly challenged with how to incorporate visual imagery on their Facebook profiles and other social media outlets. Traditional forms of displaying political competence and power do not necessarily represent the most effective way of engaging the American people. Citizens, who are accustomed to searching for and sharing information via multimedia tools, as well as receiving information from online platforms, can become more engaged in the campaigning process when online tools such as Facebook are used during the election. The adoption of such tools requires politicians to adapt their campaigning strategies and rethink some of the traditional approaches. While Obama's Facebook photographs may initially appear candid and informational, a closer investigation has demonstrated that there is more to the photograph's role than simply providing information about that candidate. By effectively using photographs, Obama communicates meanings of power or lack thereof, to the viewers.

The conclusion of this thesis will provide brief review of chapter four summarizing the analysis of how Obama displayed his power on Facebook. Next I will examine the implications of these findings to gain better understanding of what social semiotics indicates about Obama and his use of power through photographs on Facebook. Finally, the significance of this thesis will be explored by looking at what it teaches about Obama's display of power through photographs, Facebook, social semiotics and

identifying future research in each of these areas that is encouraged as a result of the findings.

Review

To understand how Obama used Facebook photographs to display power Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) theory on social semiotics was used to evaluate the photographs. Furthermore, signs and symbols in the photographs were analyzed by looking at the informational values, salience and framing to find meaning. Photographs were analyzed over the course of the year leading up to Obama's 2012 presidential inauguration.

Results of this study show that Obama's display of power was less important during the earlier photographs and during his campaign. The earlier photographs often showed his back facing the camera revealing vulnerability. In addition, it was found that this lack of power was used to put the focus on the American people and the problems they faced while encouraging the development of solutions. The later photographs show that Obama's display of power was more important after he was elected for another term of presidency. The post campaign photographs often showed Obama in a wide-open stance demonstrating powerful nonverbal body language. In addition, it was found that this transition in power was also communicated through his interaction with other figures in the photographs. This can further be analyzed by looking at the photographs in two sections: pre-election and post-election.

Pre-Election Photographs

Initially, in the pre-election campaign photographs Obama was displayed promoting a positive political image. He did this through various positive affect cues such as showing interaction with people and using patriotic symbolism as props. However, Obama displayed very few attributes in regard to power. Furthermore, he often had his back to the camera or only half his face showing revealing vulnerability. A possible interpretation could be that Obama didn't want to show his power during the campaign to alienate the people. Rather, he wanted to communicate that he was united with the people by showing he was one of the people.

This was further demonstrated through multiple Campaigner frames emphasizing the theme of mass appeal. Half of the photographs, five out of ten, showed Obama in front of a large crowd of people. Additionally, Obama often blended into the crowd appearing as a person in the pack and sending a message of togetherness. The lack of strong framing in the Campaigner frame photographs also communicated a message of closeness and unity. Obama's lack of power might have been a tactic to avoid potential alienation and to show his connection to the American people.

Obama displayed his connection with the American people in two different ways: physically and emotionally. In the Campaigner frames Obama often reached out his hands making physical contact with the people in the crowd. This communicated that Obama was reaching out to the citizens and uniting with the American people. In another photograph Obama was displayed looking at a little

boy saluting him. The photograph held a strong pathos and showed an emotional connection between Obama and the people. Obama is a hero in the eyes of the little boy and his family and he can be a hero to other Americans as well.

Obama also connects with the American people through displaying his affection for his dog Bo. Obama reveals a more playful side of his personality as he reaches out in one of the photographs to pet his dog. As the numbers of pet owners, particularly dog owners, increases it seems sensible that Obama would also reveal the love for his dog in hopes to connect with the American pet owners. Through doing so he also promoted a positive political image by revealing a more playful attitude of his character.

Finally, it was found that this lack of power was used to put the focus on the American people and the problems they faced while encouraging the development of solutions. Particularly Obama focused on the issues of higher education. Every time the focus of the photograph was on the issue of higher education, Obama was positioned at the bottom of the frame communicating that he was the realistic candidate to help develop a solution.

Additionally, Obama used metaphorical representation through the elements in his photographs to communicate how he would lead the people forward. For example, Air Force One acted as a metaphor for the government. The composition revealed that the jet (government) was the ideal means of leadership that would take the real people standing on the airstrip forward to a new place.

The 7 pre-election photographs revealed that power was less important. Obama was often shown apart of a crowd or group of people communicating

togetherness and unity. This was further demonstrated through Obama connecting to the American people both physically and emotionally. Additionally, Obama promoted a positive political image through various positive affect cues and also through revealing a more playful side of his character with his dog Bo. It was discovered that perhaps the lack of power displayed was a tactic to prevent alienation from the people. Furthermore, this lack of power was used to put the focus on the American people and the problems they faced while encouraging the development of solutions.

Post-Election Photographs

The post-election photographs displayed a significant transition in how Obama displayed his power. During the election Obama was shown as one of the people while post election he was shown above the people. Obama went from low power nonverbals to high power nonverbals displayed through making his body big and open showing dominance. In these photographs Obama was often displayed as the ideal leader at the top of the frame. This is a significant transition from the pre-election photographs where Obama was often shown at the bottom of the frame as the real candidate. This transition revealed that Obama was mirroring the power he received from the election in the photographs and that he was no longer afraid of alienating the American people with this display of power.

Obama also displayed his power through composition showing symbols of power that had been given to him by the election. Symbols included patriotic colors, flags, the White House and paintings of past presidents. The symbols hold a

power of their own and are only granted to powerful individuals. Obama displayed his power through the powerful symbols to set himself apart from the American people and Congress members revealing that he was the only person who possessed the power. Additionally, the post-election photographs showed Congress members and did not include the American people which further separated Obama from the crowd. This separation from the American people revealed that Obama was rising to the occasion of his re-election and no longer needed to convince the people through promoting a positive political image.

However, photographs did continue to show interaction with high power individuals such as Joe Biden, Michelle Obama and other Congress members. In every photograph that displayed interaction, Obama was shown as a dominant figure while the others were shown as submissive figures. This communicated that the Congress members were submitting to Obama's new position of authority and power. This also revealed that power was more important to win or impress the Congress after the election.

The post-election photographs revealed that Obama was clearly taking on a more powerful position amongst the subjects. However, Obama maintained a consistent theme of vulnerability throughout pre-election and post-election. Furthermore, in the pre-election photographs Obama revealed vulnerability to the people while in the post-election photographs Obama revealed vulnerability to the Congress. Additionally, the ways that Obama revealed vulnerability post-election was different. Through Obama displayed vulnerability in the post-election photographs he also maintained a position of power amongst the elements. This

juxtaposition of high and low power in the same photograph was a surprising paradox. However, it revealed that Obama's audience had changed from the American people to the Congress members.

This paradox of power was displayed through a combination of nonverbals and composition. For example, in the last photograph Obama had his back to the camera, revealing vulnerability. Additionally, Obama's head was positioned at the top of the frame in between a line of presidential paintings revealing that Obama was the ideal president to lead the Congress members. The framing in the photograph signified that Obama belonged in the line of presidents and consequently revealed that the other people in the frame did not. In the pre-election photographs Obama displayed his vulnerability through being a real person amongst the crowd and at the bottom of the frame while the post-election photographs displayed Obama's vulnerability as the ideal president, separated from the American people, the Congress members and at the top of the frame.

The 3 post-election photographs show that there was a significant transition in how Obama displayed power and that power was more important. Obama showed his power through large and open nonverbals, patriotic symbolism and through composition where he was positioned at the top of the frame as the ideal leader. Additionally, interaction with powerful people was used as a tactic to display power. In every photograph that Obama was displayed interacting with Congress members, Obama was shown as the dominant figure while the Congress members were shown as submissive. Finally, a consistent theme of vulnerability carried over into the post-election photographs. However, Obama still promoted a

message of power in combination with the vulnerability. This paradox of power revealed that the audience viewing the photographs changed from the American people to the Congress members.

Implications

This study has generated a number of practical implications that would be of interest to political candidates, politicians, political party representatives, educators and anyone with an interest in political visual communication on social media. These implications are not exhaustive. However, they are intended to stimulate thinking in the broader sense of how the insights from this study might impact society.

As adults who use social networking sites increases, candidates are constantly challenged with how to incorporate new technologies into their campaigns. Traditional campaigning strategies do not necessarily represent the best ways to communicate to the American people. This study revealed that Facebook photographs could do more than just display information about the candidate. Facebook cover photographs can communicate meanings about power while also promote a positive political image. There is little information regarding how social networking sites are used in political campaigns and even less research analyzes how Obama displays his power on Facebook. This study provides information on how Obama displayed his power pre-election and post-election and can be beneficial for anyone running for office who wants to begin using Facebook photographs.

As the number of political candidates who use social networking sites during the campaign increases, it seems sensible for potential candidates to research how the

photographs have been used in the past to communicate meaning. This study provided an example of how Obama used the cover photograph section on Facebook to send messages about power. This thesis revealed that power was less important pre-election and that Obama often displayed vulnerability through displaying himself as one of the crowd or by showing his back to the camera. By doing this, Obama showed his concern with the American people appearing more humble than if he were to focus solely on himself as a powerful figure in the photographs. People want a candidate who will represent the people and also who will put the power back into the hands of the people. The lack of personal power prevented possible alienation from the American people. Future candidates can benefit from considering these findings about power prior to setting up their own Facebook pages.

Next, in the pre-election photographs Obama went back and forth communicating a positive political image and a deep concern with the people's problems. Obama displayed several positive affect cues to promote a positive political image. Additionally, Obama was shown with his dog Bo communicating a more playful attitude, which also promoted a positive political image. Political candidates might want to entertain the idea of using Facebook photographs during the campaign to promote a positive political image while also showing concern for the American people's problems. Future presidential candidates and campaigns might do well to distribute the power visually during their campaign to keep the attention on the people. Through doing this, they will reveal a more humble candidate who is concerned with the needs of the people.

Additionally, the post-campaign photographs revealed that power was more important to win over the Congress members. However, Obama still displayed an

amount of vulnerability as to not come off too strongly displaying power. Furthermore, the post-election photographs revealed Obama as the dominant leader with all other subjects in submission to his authority. Future candidates can learn from how Obama displayed balanced power pre-election and post-election.

Finally, campaigns can take interest in the methodology used in this study to analyze Obama's cover photographs. The social semiotic analysis, which was the groundwork for this study, provided a clear approach to understanding how the signs and symbols within Obama's photographs created meaning. Using Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) social semiotic analysis to evaluate the visual elements of Obama's cover photographs found on Facebook provided strong evidence that Obama displayed little power in his pre-election photographs. Additionally, the signs and symbols revealed that power was more important in Obama's post-election photographs. Future campaigns and political candidates might find that this method is beneficial for analyzing any type of photograph on Facebook or on any other medium.

Limitations & Future Research

There were several limitations in this study that are important to note. First, the photographs were pulled from the official Obama Facebook profile. However, there was no way to tell if some of the photographs had been taken off or switched out during the campaign process. Furthermore, having access to this information might have changed the results of the study. Second, this research provided one possible interpretation for how Obama communicated power in the photographs. Others might have interpreted the data differently. Finally, this thesis analyzed 10 photographs. This number is significant

and revealed a sufficient amount of data as to how Obama displayed his power pre-election and post-election. However, at the time of this study only 3 photographs were uploaded post-election and only those three photographs were provided for the post-election analysis. Future research might continue this project in analyzing more post-election photographs.

As with many studies, this research raises many more questions than it answers. Many of these questions and other areas of future research are presented below.

Facebook cover photos take up the most space and span across the top portion of the profile. Directly underneath the cover photo is a frame for a personal profile picture. This study did not consider the impacts of the profile picture and cover photo analyzed together. Further research could take a semiotic approach to analyze how the two photographs create meaning through the ideal and the real.

Next, the photographs chosen for this study did not include text. However, many of the cover photos on Obama's timeline incorporated text on the photographs. Future research could analyze the photograph by using social semiotics to see if the images would be effective on their own or if they act as a secondary aid to the text. While on the topic of text interconnected with photographs, future research could also look at the captions under the photographs and analyze how they work together.

Additionally, this study looked solely at Obama's Facebook cover photos. However, there were many other candidates campaigning with Facebook photographs during the 2012 presidential election. Additional research on the contrasts between candidates cover photos during the campaign would serve to enhance this study,

Finally, this photograph did not evaluate the effectiveness of the photographs. Rather this study sought to discover how Obama displayed his power via Facebook cover photographs. Future research could take interest in the effectiveness of the photographs by taking into consideration the number of likes and comments. Also, this study only analyzed 10 photographs. A more in depth analysis could analyze more photographs to contribute to the findings.

Conclusion

As you can see, analyzing how the signs and symbols within Obama's Facebook cover photographs is significant to gaining a better understand of how Obama's photographs communicates meaning about power. This research serves as a starting point for future research that can look at various topics related to the effects of Obama, Facebook photographs and power. With the increase of adults and candidates using social networking sites such as Facebook, it is important for those in academia to continue investigating political visual rhetoric on social networking sites.

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ⁱ The term, political image, is not to be confused with the photograph. The political image references the general persona of a candidate. The persona doesn't necessarily refer to a person's looks, rather the identity, personality, role, and face of a candidate. When indicating the persona of a candidate, I use the term political image.