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The rhetorical construction of Hillary Rodham Clinton as a presidential contender in 2016: A case study of hillaryclinton.com

Retoryczne sposoby konstruowania wizerunku Hillary Rodham Clinton w kampanii prezydenckiej 2016: Studium strony hillaryclinton.com

Abstract

This article reviews some of the rhetorical means of constructing the image of Hillary Rodham Clinton as a presidential contender in 2016 election campaign. It explores this in the context of research on “gendered” political discourse particularly political campaigning and media coverage of female contenders. It argues that women politicians in the US need to be much more pro-active in controlling the construction of their public perception than male politicians. It reviews previous studies to verify whether there is more continuity or innovation in the rhetorical construction of Hillary Clinton’s political leadership. The materials from the official webpage (hillaryclinton.com) publicized in 2016 are analyzed with respect to persuasive presentational techniques and verbal and visual rhetorical devices.

Niniejsze studium poświęcone jest retorycznym sposobom konstruowania obrazu kandydatki na prezydenta USA Hillary Rodham Clinton podczas pierwszej fazy kampanii 2016 roku. Kontekstem studium jest literatura na temat różnic genderowych w dyskursie politycznym, a w szczególności badania poświęcone medialnym reprezentacjom kobiet w polityce, z których wynika, że kobiety, przynajmniej w USA, muszą bardziej aktywnie niż mężczyźni kreować swój publiczny wizerunek. Za pomocą perspektywy retorycznej, zbadano strategiczny sposób konstruowania i kontrolowania publicznego obrazowania Hillary Clinton w reakcji na przedstawienia jej kandydatury przez media głównego nurtu. Analizie poddano materiały tekstowe i wizualne z oficjalnej strony internetowej (hillaryclinton.com) z początku 2016 roku z punktu widzenia zastosowanych technik prezentacji i perswazji.

Key words

gendered political discourse, US presidential campaign, self-presentation techniques, rhetorical devices, official website, Hillary Rodham Clinton

różnice genderowe w dyskursie politycznym, amerykańska kampania prezydencka, kreowanie wizerunku, środki retoryczne, oficjalna strona, Hillary Rodham Clinton

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The rhetorical construction of Hillary Rodham Clinton as a presidential contender in 2016: A case study of hillaryclinton.com

1. Introduction

Hillary Rodham Clinton (HRC henceforth) is a brand name in American politics. However, it is a brand name that has required constant asserting and defending. As the young civil rights lawyer, the First Lady championing women's rights and healthcare reforms, the Senator introducing controversial social measures, the democratic presidential candidate in a crisis year (2008), and the Secretary of State during a global war on terrorism, she was both highly praised and unscrupulously attacked. Throughout the 2016 presidential election campaign,¹ she has needed to reinvent her brand once again to successfully compete for the highest office. In her campaign-opening video, she has already labeled herself "a champion for American families" and promised to use her experience "to stand for American values" and make the US more prosperous and secure. Her campaign management has capitalized on her visibility, making her appear as a strong leader, an approachable communicator, and "not a quitter". Even though these were the early moves in the 2016 presidential campaign, it appears that Hillary's team² has used official web channels, social media and digital communication technologies to project the candidate as primarily a competent and likeable persona.

This article reviews some of the rhetorical means of forging the latest brand image for HRC. First, it looks at some of the rhetorical strategies of "gendered" political discourse (Weatherall 2002; Ahrens 2009) in the context of political campaigning (Jamieson 1995; Lawrence and Rose 2010). It argues that women politicians need to be much more pro-active to control the construction of their public perception than male politicians, especially in the American political context, where women are traditionally assigned a lower level of political

1. Which actually started on 12 April 2015 with the campaign management releasing an official video and press release to announce HRC's candidacy.

2. Note that there is a preference within the campaign to refer to her with her first name rather than the surname or both, which could be intended as both diverting associations with her husband and inviting a more personal relation between voters and the candidate.

competence and leadership qualities. Then the study revisits some of the rhetorical strategies used in HRC's 2008 primary election campaign (Molek-Kozakowska 2010; Giordano 2012). To verify whether there is more continuity or innovation in the rhetorical construction of Hillary's political leadership in 2016, the materials from the official webpage (hillaryclinton.com) are analyzed with respect to salient persuasive presentational techniques and rhetorical devices.

2. Gender in political discourse

Over the last decades, research in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis that intends to explore the gendered features of talk and text in various social domains has produced a vast range of observations (cf. Lakoff 1975; Bucholtz and Hall 1995; Cameron 1999; Vasanta 2001, Weatherall 2002), some of which have been nuanced, verified and diversified by now. Much of this research points to differences in male and female communicative practices, which are correlated with different social roles and cultural patterns in which the two sexes tend to be involved. For example, it is claimed that due to their respective social and professional positioning, male discourses are dominated by the informative function while conversational or phatic elements mark the female speaking style, which is especially striking in professional contexts involving both men and women (Tannen 1994; 1999). However, research points to the infinite diversity of communicative and rhetorical styles *within* each gender, and warns against undue generalizations. Indeed, it indicates that analyses of specific contexts of gendered discourse, including such case studies as in this project, are needed to establish facts rather than to further perpetuate stereotypes of "gendered rhetorics" (cf. Cameron 1998).

In addition to sociolinguistic studies, research within the critical approach to discourse analysis (cf. Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999) sees differences in male and female communication styles as resulting from ideological naturalization of asymmetrical power relations. According to patriarchal social arrangements, women's interests and needs are systematically subordinated to men's. This leads to features of "powerless language" being inculcated in women, particularly a lack of competitiveness and assertiveness in exposition, avoidance of specialist registers, more facilitative and co-constructing preferences in interaction (questions, confirmations, tags, hedges), more strategic degrees of emotionality, sensitivity, and empathy in discourse as well more adherence to usage norms and social conventions (cf. West, Lazar and Kramarae 1997; Lazar 2007). Some feminist critical discourse analysts aim to disclose the complex and subtle ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and asymmetrical power relations are in fact discursively produced and sustained, but also negotiated and

challenged in specific contexts. In a similar vein, this study contributes to such an orientation by showing the specific rhetorical devices applied in the case of a communicative practice of an American female public figure in her discursive self-positioning in a sphere of politics where unequal status is ascribed to genders, as is the case in the socio-cultural context of the contemporary US (cf. Jamieson 1995).

2.1. Women politicians in a double bind

According to Jamieson (1995; cf. also Giordano 2012), American female politicians have had to face a set of obstacles on their way to establishing their stable political status and social recognition. Jamieson calls this “being in a double bind”: No matter if they adopted an overtly assertive and dominant style of doing politics or a more feminine, emotional one, women politicians were likely to be subjected to public criticism. Apparently, if they fully devoted to their political career, acquired high competences, acted and talked decisively and followed rational advice, sometimes seeming tough and disagreeable, they were condemned for being unfeminine, overambitious and too similar to male politicians. On the other hand, if they seemed to be more private and home – or family-oriented individuals who disclosed their emotional reactions in public and used personal narratives and hypothetical scenarios rather than abstract and factual information, they are denounced for signs of weakness, incompetence and powerlessness. Admittedly, female politicians’ specific rhetorical styles that resulted from trying to navigate “the double bind,” and the media focus on impressions, communication and appearance may yield lower public trust and appreciation of women in politics (cf. Kahn 1996; Bligh *et al.* 2012).

Indeed, successful female politicians have had to manoeuvre to strike a delicate balance between the gendered expectations and discursive attachments that reproduce gender norms through individually designed rhetorical styles, as was the case with Margaret Thatcher, who was advised, for example, to lower her voice to sound less shrill and speak more slowly to sound more serious. In addition, her speeches were linguistically marked for authoritativeness in delivery through the usage of strong modals of obligation, rhetorically charged enumerations and contrasts, and assertive even aggressive vocabulary, including figurative expressions have earned her the nickname of the Iron Lady (Fairclough 1989; Charteris Black 2005; Ponton 2010). This study of another high profile female politician is underpinned by findings on speech styles of previous female public figures and the male-centered prototypical rhetorical styles in politics.

2.2. Gendered coverage of presidential elections

As documented by Giordano (2012, 45-54), American presidential campaigns are extensively covered by the media, which use specific frames and metaphors to make political coverage ever more palatable, understandable or exciting. However, many of the frames involved in media coverage of political campaigns are “gendered” in the sense of either appealing specifically to male audiences or positioning female politicians in the figurative context in which male politicians have an advantage. For example, if a presidential campaign is represented as a sporting event, particularly a race (including allusions to such disciplines as horse or dog racing), the female contenders are often positioned as “underdogs” or not “in the right league.” In addition, if presidency is primarily conceptualized as “handling a burden” of responsibility while “wielding the power” of the office, women presidential candidates may not be perceived as always strong enough to fit in with such prescribed schemas. The socio-cultural expectations, not to even mention the physical or psychological “limitations” ascribed to women, privilege male candidates and make the association between presidency and femininity seem less natural or even more awkward.

In a similar vein, if political leadership is spoken of as determined by “strength of character” and “toughness” to face challenge, and if these qualities are not necessarily encouraged in or embodied by women, female contenders’ personal qualifications for the job are implicitly being questioned, if not discredited. Last but not least, if politics is seen as “dirty business” and as “spin” (dominated by “spin-doctors”), women, who are prototypically seen as the community’s custodians of purity, moral value and integrity, subject themselves to criticism for willingly engaging in this sphere of activity.

With the type of coverage that privileges male contenders over females, as claimed by Bligh et al. (2012, 29), female leaders need to be much more sensitive and pro-active than men in monitoring and perhaps counterbalancing the images, conceptualizations, frames and schemas through which the media represent them. Given that, it is worth investigating how such media channels as official websites, public profiles on social networks, communicator’s channels that can largely be controlled by campaign managements tend to be used for the purpose of “counterbalancing” and “managing” the dominant constructions of female politicians that emerge from the mainstream media coverage of the campaign.

2.3. HRC’s troubled history with the media

For anyone familiar with the major developments in American politics and its media coverage over the last few decades it is apparent that HRC’s relationship with

the media can be called troubled, to say the least. As a First Lady of Arkansas and then during two terms of Bill Clinton's presidency in Washington in the 1990s, she was often attacked by their political opponents and increasingly confrontational media outlets (cf. Clinton 2004), which saw her as a career woman, who was elitist, and dishonest (especially after the Whitewater scandal). Some of her actions, decisions and announcements, particularly in view of her husband's sex scandals, have been interpreted as signs of amorality, calculation or an ultra-feminist mindset. After she was elected Senator from New York, she was often being described by right-wing pundits as manipulative, controlling, cold and angry. During the 2008 presidential primary election campaign, HRC was perceived by some as overambitious, obstinate and power-hungry and criticized for hurting the Democratic party by not withdrawing sooner from the race. As a Secretary of State in Obama's first Cabinet, she was represented as too hawkish and authoritarian while her alleged "big ego" precluded her from cooperating within the administration.

If we examine the details of the 2008 media coverage of HRC's activities, as analyzed by Lawrence and Rose (2010), we can notice the prevalence of systematically negative representations and evaluations of her campaign. Political commentators often held her to a higher standard than other candidates (and interpreted her minor mistakes and blunders as signs of incompetence). They also criticized her communicative style and her past history with the media, sometimes referring to her time in the White House as First Lady for various unwarranted comparisons. In the specific context of 2008 primary election, they offered speculative scenarios by contrasting the prospects of the first female and the first African American president and the implications thereof. Rather disingenuously, they tended to use male-centered frames which were hard for HRC to fit in with. She was also attacked on appearance or criticized for either signs of emotion or lack of emotion, which inevitably put her in a double bind. Lawrence and Rose (2010) conclude that generally, the media perpetuated gendered coverage of the campaign attacking HRC on foreign policy, economy and defense (because as a woman, she could not possibly offer competent proposals here) and assuming that she has to be able to deal with education, health care, environment and civil rights. With the security-related issues and economic problems dominating public discourses in the US at that time, this media perspective might have put her at a disadvantage as a presidential contender.

To counterbalance the biased and negative representations, HRC's 2008 campaign managers initiated extensive online campaigning activities that included a fully controlled and proactive official website and mailing campaign, as analyzed by Molek-Kozakowska (2010). That website concentrated on disseminating

information on domestic issues and human interest topics. It offered emotionally engaging “real stories” and gave constant updates from the campaign trail in various formats (videos, statements, letters). Supporters were invited to contribute and be involved in the campaign through blogs and services. While the media saw HRC as distant and elitist, the website tried to diminish any perceived distance between the candidate and the public through informal style (there was little political speech-making or long print material). Moreover, the website built supporter inclusivity with multiple references to “America” and “Americans” (rather than Democrats) which projected a sense of larger ideological consensus within HRC’s political platform. Also the multimedia materials foregrounded HRC’s personal qualities, engineering the image of her as a warm, charming and protective person in contrast to the images of HRC that some conservative political commentators and gossip media projected.

3. Analysis of hillaryclinton.com

As mentioned above, this study is devoted to tracing how the official campaign website constructs HRC as a presidential contender in 2016. Taking into consideration the fact that this form of mediated political communication is highly persuasive, it appropriates the rhetorical perspective in the further analysis and interpretation. It is aimed to explore both the verbal and the visual resources which were used to construct HRC as a legitimate presidential contender, despite her gender and troubled history with the media. Basing on the review of previous studies above, it also aims to verify whether there is more continuity or innovation in the rhetorical construction of HRC’s political leadership.

Classical rhetoric has few analytic categories that enable us to study gendered discourse, as classical treatises offer most information and advice on speaking, arguing and presenting oneself well in male-dominated occupations and in the social circumstances of patriarchal societies. Women could only speak well (if they were ever allowed to) if they imitated that norm. Twentieth-century feminist rhetoricians have attempted to theorize the “feminine rhetorical style” in public discourse. For example, Campbell (1989) notes how the feminine rhetorical style has been extrapolated from the established cultural norms of femininity. In contrast to the masculine style, which involves logos-based argumentative and confrontational rhetoric, the feminine style would be marked for personal orientation, narrativity, self-disclosure, intimacy and domesticity. The rhetorical devices typical of the feminine style would include anecdotal evidence, domestic metaphors and emotion-laden expressivity. If there was any refutation or confrontation, it would certainly be indirect and self-effacing. However illuminating they are, these

theories do not offer adequate tools for the purpose of the present analysis in which HRC's rhetorical style might in fact be a hybrid between female elocution preferences and the normative requirements of political campaign discourses.

By contrast, Charteris-Black's (2005) study of late twentieth-century political rhetoric offers a critical perspective on persuasive discourses, as authored by charismatic English-speaking leaders from Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King to Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. By linking persuasive talk with the notion of leadership (i.e. the ability to mobilize people's cognitive, emotional and behavioral resources), which, indeed, in many cultures is coded as a masculine quality, he is able to systematically study rhetorical patterns that characterize various politicians' styles of persuasion (Charteris-Black 2005, 1-4). He identifies metaphors, similes, antitheses, three-part-lists, rhetorical questions and various lexical and syntactic manoeuvres (inversion, emphasis, repetition) as markers of "persuasive power" (Charteris-Black 2005, 8-19). For example, the use of "politics is a battle" metaphor by Margaret Thatcher and her "opposition is death force" conceptualization in criticizing her Labour Party antagonists could be interpreted as her attempt to construct herself as a tough talker and strong leader.

Although the official website as a sample in the present study consists not only of political speeches but also of various other texts (e.g., statements, manifestos, news releases, political advertisements, thank-you notes, reports, videos of rally speeches and debates), and its visual composition is very important, still it is assumed that to build a consistent public image, the website's design must correspond to HRC's rhetorical style (cf. Giordano 2012), or, at least, construct her public persona in a plausible way. That is why some of Charteris-Black's rhetorical categories, not the feminist rhetorical theories, are appropriated in the following analysis.

3.1 Homepage's visual design

The homepage hillaryclinton.com has a minimalistic design, which enables smooth navigation (Nielsen and Tahir 2002). The composition of the main image (as of January and February 2016) shows HRC on the left side, on a stage reaching out to supporters during what must have been a lively voters' rally. Color symbolism on the page involves contrasts of red details and intense but light blue color indicative of the Democratic Party, but also of modernity and stability (Lacy 1996). HRC's logotype for this campaign (see Fig.1) has been made to appeal to younger supporters (as well as many other items and apparel sold online as supporters' packs) and involves an arrow embedded into the horizontal line of the letter H.



Fig.1: Logotype and “Hillary for America” slogan on ingredients of a supporter’s pack,
<https://shop.hillaryclinton.com/products/supporter-pack>

Hyperlinks to various social media (e.g., LinkedIn, the Briefing blog, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest) are to be found at the bottom of the homepage, while such labels as BIO, STATES, ISSUES, FEED, EVENTS, ORGANIZE, SHOP, DONATE constitute the stable elements of the list at the top. The latest (professionally edited) videos from the campaign can be immediately accessed from the website, so can news reports from the campaign trail, highlights of the week, alerts about new information and links to speeches, blogsites and reports. It seems that hillaryclinton.com is not only professionally managed and aesthetically pleasing, but also easy to navigate and search for desirable information, as well as compatible with the overall strategy of constructing HRC as the most trustworthy progressive candidate, as a modern and future-oriented politician (despite her age), an approachable communicator, and as, indeed, “a champion for America, American families and American values.”

3.2 Communicating the political platform

One of the main aims of running an official website is to present the political platform of the candidate in such a way that it would mobilize the largest supporter base without alienating any of the major regional or social classes or interest groups. Ideally, the website should not give an impression that female-oriented or youth-oriented projects are prioritized over those that males and seniors find resonant. To avoid undue “biases” that come from foregrounding some issues over others, the website lists the main issues of HRC’s campaign and future presidency in an alphabetical order. Each issue is first listed, then highlighted in a slogan-like phrase, and then elaborated upon through a “read-more” hypertextual functionality. This gives a synthetic overview of HRC’s platform without overwhelming

the readers with information, and allows them to follow their own priorities when exploring the site. Below is the enumeration of HRC's issues with slogans pertaining to each issue in brackets:

- Alzheimer's disease (We can prevent, effectively treat, and make an Alzheimer's cure possible by 2025);
- Campaign finance reform (Our democracy should work for everyone, not just the wealthy and well-connected);
- Campus sexual assault (It's not enough to condemn campus sexual assault. We need to stop campus sexual assault);
- Climate change and energy (Making America the clean energy superpower of the 21st century);
- College (The New College Compact: Costs won't be a barrier, debt won't hold you back);
- Criminal justice reform (Our criminal justice system is out of balance);
- Disability rights (We must continue to expand opportunities for all Americans);
- Early childhood education (Every child deserves the chance to live up to his or her God-given potential);
- Economy (The defining economic challenge of our time is raising incomes for hard-working Americans);
- Gun violence prevention (It is past time we act on gun violence);
- Health care (Affordable health care is a basic human right);
- Immigration reform (America needs comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship);
- Infrastructure (Strong infrastructure is critical to a strong economy);
- K–12 education (A world-class education for every child in every community);
- Labor (When unions are strong, America is strong);
- LGBT equality (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans deserve to live their lives free from discrimination);
- National security (With policies that keep us strong and safe, America can lead the world in the 21st century);
- Paid leave (It's time to guarantee paid family and medical leave in America);
- Rural communities (America's rural communities are at the heart of what makes this country great);
- Small business (Hillary Clinton will be a small business president);
- Social Security and Medicare (We must preserve, protect, and strengthen these lifelines);
- Substance use disorder and addiction (Through improved treatment, prevention, and training, we can end this quiet epidemic once and for all);
- Veterans, the armed forces, and their families (America must fully commit to supporting veterans);
- Voting rights (We should be making it easier to vote, not harder);
- Wall Street and corporate America (Wall Street must work for Main Street);
- Women's rights and opportunity (Women's issues are family issues, economic issues, and crucial to our future competitiveness);
- Workforce and skills (Every American should be able to learn new skills in order to advance in their careers).

It can be seen how the use of strong modals of obligation (*must, should, need*) and of likelihood rather than possibility (*can, will/won't*), as well as parallel syntactic constructions with “to be” (cf. “Affordable health care is a basic human right”)

creates a sense of urgency and authority. The application of the definite article also makes an implication that the issue is generally known. For rhetorical effects, a few three-part-lists (cf. “We can prevent, effectively treat, and make an Alzheimer’s cure possible by 2025”), antitheses (cf. “We should be making it easier to vote, not harder”) or repetitions (cf. “When unions are strong, America is strong”) are used. In the texts, “productive” metaphors of policy-making as building, investment or movement forward tend to dominate, with a conspicuous absence of references to Republicans or negative evaluations of other contenders.

Such repetitively used lexical items as “America,” inclusive “we,” and quantifiers (all, every, everyone), together with collective nouns and certain novel modifying collocations (cf. “a small-business president,” “the clean energy superpower”) project a sense of the voters largely sharing a core of common interests and ideas despite political divisions.³ In fact, these rhetorical devices often enhance the argument for liberal and progressive political orientation that appeals to the democratic principles of participation and the role of the government in intervening in the redistribution of wealth and in facilitating the access to services.

3.3 Biographical information

The way HRC is presented in the official website is instrumental to revealing the proactive efforts taken by the management to engineer her public persona. One of the strategic aspects of this self-presentation is the attempt to navigate around the double binds and to present HRC as an extremely successful politician, whose life, nevertheless, has been devoted to “service” not career. See this header in the bio section:

Hillary Clinton has served as Secretary of State, Senator from New York, First Lady of the United States, First Lady of Arkansas, a practicing lawyer and law professor, activist, and volunteer, but the first things her friends and family will tell you is that she’s never forgotten where she came from or who she’s been fighting for throughout her life.

Secondly, the webpage highlights, through both visual and verbal resources, that HRC’s public activities have not interfered with her traditionally feminine “duties,” and that her caring for the American families and communities derives directly from her personal experience of being a wife, a mother, a friend, a member of a local community, and recently a grandmother, as represented for example in Fig. 2.:

3. Compatible with findings in Molek-Kozakowska’s (2010) analysis of 2008 campaign materials.



Fig. 2: Hillary and Chelsea Clinton
<https://www.hillaryclinton.com/about/bio/>

The use of some black and white photographs in HRC's biographical site may be a useful device to bring the ethos of the origins to the foreground, and to indicate that her personal qualities are deeply rooted in traditional American values, possibly to counterbalance the image of an ultrafeminist promoted by some conservative media outlets. Apart from strictly private information, the bio-page features most highlights (photos, quotations) from her greatest public moments (including HRC's speech at the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women's rights, or her confirmation as a Senator). The website managers have taken good care that most of the overtly positive evaluations of HRC come from other figures (a strategy of endorsement) while the biographical narrative focuses on her motivations and actions. This device may be used effectively to present HRC as a modest, relatively self-effacing figure, whose achievements, nevertheless, should be widely acknowledged and appreciated.

3.4 Contested issues in the campaign

One of the potentially troublesome aspects of each presidential campaign is to confront criticism and deal with controversial issues that divide the populace and that require a certain degree of rhetorical skill to present. Some of the key issues HRC had to struggle with was her opposition to Citizens United, an organization that collects funds from wealthy individuals and channels them into political campaigns (usually to the detriment of Democratic candidates, and putting contenders without large financial support at a disadvantage). The representation of the controversial issue in the website testifies to an attempt to represent HRC as a strong

advocate for popular democracy, and to build her ethos, for example by an inter-textual reference to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (emphasis mine):

Our democracy should work for everyone, not just the wealthy and well-connected.

"We have to end the flood of secret, unaccountable money that is distorting our elections, corrupting our political system, and drowning out the voices of too many everyday Americans. Our democracy should be about expanding the franchise, not charging an entrance fee."

Hillary is calling for aggressive campaign finance reform to end the stranglehold that wealthy interests have over our political system and restore *a government of, by, and for the people*—not just the wealthy and well-connected. Her proposals will curb the outsized influence of big money in American politics, shine a light on secret spending, and institute real reforms to raise the voices of regular voters.

The uses of antitheses, three-part-lists and repetitions, but, above all, of metaphors sourced from physical and embodied experience (e.g., *flood, drowning, stranglehold, curb, shine a light*) are to give the sense of determination and strength with which HRC is to confront the issue and "protect" the democratic values.

Another controversial issue of the 2016 campaign may be that of how to confront the problems of national security at a time of increased international tensions, military conflicts and terrorist attacks.

National security

"I believe the future holds far more opportunities than threats if we exercise creative and confident leadership that enables us to shape global events rather than be shaped by them."

Our economy provides the foundation for our leadership, our diplomatic influence, and our military might. We succeed when we invest in our people, our infrastructure, and our technological edge. As secretary of state, Hillary expanded global anti-terrorism cooperation and helped step up our efforts to go after terrorist recruitment, propaganda, and safe havens. As president, she'll ensure the United States maintains the best-trained, best-equipped, and strongest military the world has ever seen.

As a female, HRC has to prove her competence, experience and familiarity with the domain of national defense and position herself as a future possible "commander-in-chief" that will not hesitate in the context of a military confrontation. To do so, this short fragment abounds in contrasts (opportunities/threats, shape/be shaped, as secretary/as president, past tense/future tense) and 4 cases of three-part lists (our leadership, our diplomatic influence, and our military might; our people, our infrastructure, and our technological edge; terrorist recruitment, propaganda, and safe havens; the best-trained, best-equipped, and strongest military), some marked with military jargon and superlative adjectival forms.

3.5. *Personal narratives of a candidate*

An official website is a venue of strategic self-presentation that allows HRC to speak in her personal voice that she is not able to adopt elsewhere in the media (thus giving an impression of naturalness in self-expression, free of manipulation or spin-doctoring). For example, in an authored journal-like report entitled “10 months ago I launched my campaign for president. Here are the things I’ll never forget” published on January 29, 2016, HRC reveals her private motivations, strategically positioning herself as a people-person, rather than an elitist establishment insider:

From the very beginning, I wanted this campaign to be a little different. So instead of kicking things off with a big speech, we headed out to talk directly with people—in coffee shops, at churches, in backyards, at community colleges, and yes, at a Chipotle in Maumee, Ohio (...)

From our very first trip to Iowa of this campaign—listening to Bryce Smith talk about his bowling alley and his student loans. I recently made good on my promise to come visit! (...)

What I heard in those early days—and every day since—has stuck with me. People have shared their hopes and their worries. But even as they talked about the challenges their families, businesses, schools, and communities are facing, there was a sense of positive possibility (...)

Those conversations have informed me and helped shape this campaign. They’ve made me a better candidate. And I believe that, thanks to everyone I’ve met, I will be a better president—someone who truly understands what we need to do to give our kids and grandkids a better future (...)

The informal style of writing that simulates conversational register, the attention to details of locations, the frequent enumerations, and the balance between the focus on herself and on the issues that originated with her interlocutors must have been seen as useful devices that could remedy the media representation of HRC as detached from the problems that concern average Americans, particularly representatives of the small-town America, the back-bone of the nation. The imagery that accompanies this autobiographical piece reinforces this strategic attempt at representing HRC as “a champion for America,” as exemplified in Fig. 3.:



Fig. 3. Image accompanying article “10 months ago I launched my campaign for president. Here are the things I’ll never forget” <https://www.hillaryclinton.com/feed/>

4. Conclusions

An official website of a campaigning politician is a site of persuasive discourse that, despite keeping up the appearances of formality and representativeness is primarily designed to promote the candidacy by appealing to the largest possible voter base. In the case of HRC, the website is additionally an important tool of proactively managing her public image and counterbalancing the negative and disadvantageous representations of her and her campaign in some mainstream media. As for a woman who aspires to be the first female US president, the website is also where she is able to self-represent as a legitimate contender, to navigate the double binds and gendered norms of political discourse, and to project a positive (yet plausible and consistent) image of herself as a competent politician and a strong leader.

In the course of the analysis of various samples of textual material publicized in the website, one can note the systematicity of verbal markers of strength and determination, with various compositional strategies (enumerations, generic modifications) and rhetorical devices (e.g., metaphors of buildings, fight, investment or movement; three-part lists, parallelisms, antitheses), as well as intertextual references to authoritative ethos-building sources. These are complemented with some personalized narratives, evaluative endorsing expressions, and inclusive references to all Americans that presuppose that they all share the ideological convictions of HRC's progressive politics.

Unlike in the case of speech-making alone, the rhetorical analysis of the official website can be extended to include not only the verbal components, but also the design and the visual resources applied to construct a candidate's public image. Across HRC's website we note highly consistent typography and imagery, a range of well-designed pictorial devices with color synchrony, and motion picture elements (e.g., gifs, videos of memorable soundbites, "claptrap" shots that project the magnitude of voter support) that energize HRC's representation. The contender's positive evaluation can be further disseminated (by the site's visitors) via all kinds of social media and through hypertextuality. These images often construct HRC as "powerful" and "leader-like" in situations that enhance her ethos, yet without diminishing the pathos inherent in such emotionally-laden situations as rallies and debates. They also help her in maneuvering around the double binds of being a female in a male-dominated context of American politics.

Although the official website is primarily maintained to counterbalance and engineer the positive public image of the candidate, to be accepted by voters, it has to be consistent with what the candidate has stood for so far. It can be claimed that many features of HRC rhetorical style found here resemble what other analysts have noticed about her previous performances. As regards her speech style, as noted

by Giordano (2012, 119), HRC applies a “feminine rhetoric in order to further her personal ideology”; however, “she reveals herself to be direct, staunch, firm, and unambiguous when she decides to adopt strategic linguistic features to get straight to the point (...) using a sort of purposeful ‘didactic discourse,’ in which punctual, authoritarian repetition is used to transmit objective reality in a highly persuasive manner” (Giordano 2012, 120). The website, additionally, mitigates the authority-laden construction of HRC as a presidential contender with subtler femininity and collectivist appeals. As a result, HRC avoids using the markers of “powerless language” that feminist discourse analysts and rhetoricians have identified, and, unlike Margaret Thatcher who restricted herself to negative military-sourced metaphors of politics, she has a preference for constructive representations that are people-oriented and carry the enthusiasm for progressive politics that purportedly enable the country to face the future with renewed hope and trust.

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