**Critical Reflection 2: 2012 Presidential Debate**

Levi George

Department of Communication, Purdue University

COM 31800: Prin. Of Persuasion

Prof. Kimberly Myers

October 1, 2020

1. Apply Burke’s approach to analyze the language used in the case study.
   1. Both Obama and Romney don’t use any of the guilt or shame that Burke proposed could be used. However, they both try to co-create the same ideas with the audience. They try to align themselves with the sub-stances of the people that they are being questioned by. Obama even goes so far as to present his daughter’s future as a sign of his own motivation to promote women getting jobs. I think that this may be the best example of co-creation of ideas between the candidates and the audience.
2. Conduct a semiotic analysis on the case study.
   1. Obama had started his first term in the 2008 recession and in 2012 we had been getting out of it and could focus on rebuilding the economy. The 2008 recession instilled a lot of fear for security in terms of economics. Which is why the debate opened with questions about jobs. Additionally, the Iraq war had just ended, this had also come up in the last 30 minutes of the debate. Immigration has always been an issue for the people of the U.S., and this was brought up around half-way through. This set the concerns that the audience would want addressed and the questions that they might ask.
   2. The setting for the debate is supposed to be one of respect and examination of our candidates. So, people understand that they need to be patient and quiet while the candidates speak. Additionally, Mitt Romney and Obama are supposed to understand that they take turns to respond to questions. These are the codes that are understood.
3. Give examples how language is used in functional, semantic, and thematic ways in the case study
   1. Some real hot words are “Jobs”, “Energy”, “Equality”, “Taxes”. These words are used by both candidates to earn points with the audience. Jobs, Energy, and Equality are all used to gain positive standing with the audience. While “Taxes” has a negative theme in the eyes of many Americans, Obama and Romney both use this in conjunction with the idea of reducing taxes to garner positive standing.
   2. Both candidates use words that function to display the fitness of the candidates and semantically display growth that will occur in the U.S. if a candidate gets the presidency. They claim that they themselves can increase jobs, through energy, improve equality of the sexes and races, and reduce the taxes that buffet the middle-class. I think that the only thematic examples that exist in this debate is the feeling that these words have and how they influence the audience.
4. Analyze the overarching persuasive message/s in the case study according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.
   1. The basic idea is that people want someone who can ensure that they can get what they need. In this case, the first portion of the debate was based on the production of jobs. Jobs will give people the money they need to buy groceries, the afford a home, to put clothes on their back. These basic needs are so powerful that people are going to base their decision on who can give them what they need in order to survive.
5. Describe the ways in which consistency is used as a persuasive strategy in the case study.
   1. Obama brings up how Mitt Romney is talking about how to get more jobs in the energy industry through Coal Plants and establishing other methods of utilizing natural gases and fuels. He then remarks at how previously, Mitt Romney was happy to take down a Coal plant, stating that Mitt had said; “This plant kills!” This is a good example of inconsistency on Mitt Romney’s part. This dissonance in the minds of the audience harms their view of Mitt.
   2. Consistency is very important in this debate; it displays the capability and the honesty of the candidates. Additionally, it is used to try and damage a candidate position while strengthening your own. By minimizing the amount of dissonance that you produce, you protect your reputation with the audience. Consonance built through security is being used frequently, both candidates try to assure the audience of the future by declaring the jobs and things they will create to improve the well-being of the U.S.
6. What types of evidence and reasoning are exemplified in the case study?
   1. I think that a lot of rationally processed evidence is used. Mitt Romney mentions how the amount of gas and oil production has decreased during Obama’s term. This is an example of statistics being used as evidence.
   2. Mitt Romney uses Effect-to-Cause to target Obama for the above reason, it sounded to me like Mitt Romney was saying in more polite language. “Obama lowered our natural fuels production therefore Obama isn’t taking care of America’s Jobs.”
7. Give 2-4 examples of logical fallacies exemplified in the case study.
   1. I think there may be some instances of ad populum in the arguments that they make, simply because they occasionally don’t give a real response to the question. Except that they will “reduce” so-n-so or that they will create more jobs. Like in the first question asked to Mitt Romney, he doesn’t give a real response except by stating that he would not only create more jobs but also make going to school easier, (something very important to a student).
   2. I think that Obama may have used an Ad hominem attack when he claimed that Mitt Romney was concerned with making the rich do better and play by different rules than the rest of us. It seemed un-founded without evidence.
   3. I think a great example of a Red Herring Fallacy is in Mitt Romney’s opening statement. When asked about jobs for the first question, Mitt Romney didn’t exactly explain how he would create jobs, instead he went onto a tangent about college and an anecdote about how a Massachusetts institution gave students a scholarship.