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Case-Study Proposal: 2016 Presidential Meme Wars

The 2016 Presidential Election went down in the books as one of the most bizarre and controversial in U.S. history. The disappointing result left millions of Americans scratching their heads and asking themselves how Donald Trump became the 45th president of United States, despite his sexual misconduct allegations, hateful rhetoric, and the links between his associates to Russian officials. When analyzing the elements that contributed to Trump’s victory, memes are often disregarded or overlooked. As crazy as it may sound, memes had a significant impact on the outcome of this historic presidential election. Memes are powerful; their humor allows them to spread like wildfire across all social media platforms. Once memes go viral, they are seen by millions of people around the world. There were large amounts of memes circulating around social media addressing both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. For this case-study proposal, I will be analyzing a total of 2 rhetorical artifacts. One memes focusing on Hillary Clinton and another one focusing on Donald Trump. Analyzing these memes will help answer my proposed research question: How did memes contribute to Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections?

During the presidential elections, most of the memes targeting Hillary Clinton had similar themes. The first meme I will be analyzing pictures Clinton speaking into a microphone with a caption around her that reads, “I DID NOT HAVE TEXTUAL RELATIONS WITH THE SERVER!” The caption makes this meme successful because during his time in office, former President of the United States, Bill Clinton was accused of having an affair with Monica Lewinsky. In one of his most iconic speeches, Bill Clinton denied these accusations by stating, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.” By incorporating similar phrasing, this meme attempts to humiliate Hillary Clinton for Bill’s scandal during his presidency. The caption also seeks to ridicule Clinton for her email controversy in 2015. During her time as Secretary of State, Clinton was accused to have used her personal family’s email server to handle classified emails. Highlighting Hillary’s email accusation through the use of clever wordplay, allowed this meme to become one of the most popular throughout the presidential elections. Clinton’s bright red blazer, pose and face expression makes her look like a fierce dictator who is ready to take control; someone who you would not want to vote for.

When comparing the content between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton memes, one can easily observe that there is more variety in the memes addressing Trump. In the meme world, variety is usually a good thing. Trump’s reality television career could be a reasonable explanation for this larger amount of variety. The second meme that I will be examining shows Trump sitting in a chair, pointing at the camera. Like Clinton’s meme, Trumps also contains a caption which reads, “OBAMA YOU’RE FIRED.” Trump’s popular phrase, “you’re fired,” is recognized by millions of people around the U.S. because of Trump’s former TV show, *The Apprentice*. Using a phrase that is familiar to the general U.S. population to target Obama was a clever way to pull voters on Trump’s side. The picture’s setting, dim lighting, and Trump’s posture add a theme of positive masculine power. In addition to masculine power, Trump’s posture also adds a sense credibility because it is similar to the one the iconic Uncle Sam uses in the “I want you” posters.

Works Cited

"Hillary Clinton Logic." *Imgflip*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Sept. 2017. <https://imgflip.com/i/r65e7>.

"Donald Trump You're Fired." *Imgflip*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Sept. 2017. <https://imgflip.com/i/16743c>.

For better reference



