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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 4 rhetorical artifacts. Two memes focusing on Hillary Clinton and two others 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 the meme stand out 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 iconic speeches, Bill Clinton addressed the scandal 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 actions during his presidency. The caption also seeks to ridicule Clinton for her email controversy. 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 of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton memes, one can easily tell that there is more variety in the memes addressing Trump. In the meme world, having more variety is usually a good thing. A good explanation for this could be Trump’s reality television career. 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.” The phrase “you’re fired” is a popular phrase used by Trump in his show, The Apprentice. Adding this phrase as the caption makes

Donald trump himself was a meme. Donald Trump won the meme wars.