Keeping a Cool Head: Using Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation to analyze the "Ice Bucket Challenge" as an effective viral phenomenon

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Abstract

In July and August of 2014 the Ice Bucket Challenge became a worldwide viral phenomenon on social media and revolutionized the way non-governmental organizations market themselves. It was created to spread awareness and raise money for the research of the amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) disease. Literally millions of videos were uploaded and shared within the online community of people dumping buckets full of ice-water on their heads. This challenge led to instant visibility for ALS and an extraordinary number of donations in a short amount of time to support their research. I analyze why this particular internet meme went viral, what factors influenced and drove its success; and what caused its resolution eventually.

Using a rhetorical approach, I situate the Ice Bucket Challenge in the context of Bitzer's rhetorical situation and argue that as an internet meme it has its own life cycle of persuasion. I examine the exigence leading to the creation of this exact challenge and analyze the changing persuasive capacity in its evolving life cycle. I further investigate how and if people understood the reasons for the ICE Bucket Challenge and what constraints occurred. Moreover I explore how internet cultures work and the possible audiences to whom this challenged is addressed; why people decide to partake or opt out; if their response is fitting; and what it tells us about being a participatory online culture. I also draw from other research concerned with the question why certain memes catch on and other don't, to try explain why this challenge was chosen over other ones. Applying Bitzer's rhetorical situation to ALS reveals the effective persuasive strategies available and also the usefulness of rhetorical analysis for understanding online viral memes in advertising. My research argues that the Ice Bucket Challenge most effectively meets the constraints of audience and purpose through its life cycle in social media at the maturity stage.

Can You Be Fat and Feminine? A Content Analysis of the Language Used in Continuing the Stigmatization of "Fat" in American Culture

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Abstract

Facing only negative representations and unfavorable stereotypes about being overweight or obese in the media, American women are constantly pressured to slim down or remain thin. In turn, the diet industry in the United States has grown exponentially, peaking at an annual revenue of 61 billion dollars in 2013 (LaRosa 2013). Since our society has placed an enormous emphasis on becoming thin, overweight and obese individuals, particularly women, have become a target group for discrimination. However, the exact reason for the cultural fixation surrounding "fat" remains unclear. Based on Burke's rhetoric of motives and Goffman's definition of stigma, this study aims to determine what it means for an individual to be labeled "fat" and in what ways, physically and emotionally, weight-related stigma is communicated to young men and women. Based on the idea that rhetoric creates meanings, I hypothesize that responses on the questionnaire reveal motives that affirm that "fat" is not just a physical state, but it continues to be a moral failure of character. Even in 2014, the stigmatization of "fat" remains negative. Approximately 100 college-aged women and men from central Pennsylvania are given an anonymous questionnaire that explores the perception of women's self-concept, one's perception of overweight women, and the messages that the media send to consumers about femininity, size, and health. For example, the survey asks questions such as, "What adjectives comes to mind when you hear the word fat?" and "Are there certain foods that you would consider masculine? Feminine?" Through a content analysis, this study affirms that the label "fat" is undesirable due to not only health-related concerns, but also remain a strong negative stigma, affecting a woman's self-concept or self-esteem.

Narrowing the Divide: Power of Politics or Power to the People?

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The aim of this research is to explore global initiatives that are narrowing the digital divide between the "haves" and the "have not's" i.e., those with access to technology and those without. The digital divide is a key area of study in communication and media studies, which continues to analyze and debate policy responses to the inequality, amplified as a result of technological advances. Both public and private sectors develop and implement their own strategies in the hopes to eradicate the technology inequality that permeates our communities. Regardless of their origin, the hope is to narrow this divide at both the macro and micro levels of peoples' lives in order to prevent an hegemonic monopoly of knowledge that is hardly conducive to equality. Once equal access to knowledge, tools and opportunities are available, the possibility for greater freedom and global communication can be achieved.

In order to gain this understanding, I present a critical analysis of several countries from three different continents: North America, Africa and Asia. These will include the United States, China, Tunisia and Uganda. I have chosen representative countries, which advocate for technological change and development. In addition, they were selected based on available documentation of past, present and future initiatives. First, I reveal the attitudes towards technology of each country providing a basis for understanding. Secondly, I examine the state of technology in each area and their position as it relates to the digital divide. This will include a review of their international policy and examples of past, present and future global initiatives in each country in both the public and private sector. Finally, I relate all of these findings to the implications these initiatives have on the future state of the digital divide in each of these countries.

I argue through global initiatives the bridge between the digital divide is narrowing rather than expanding. Through the use of data visualization and critical analysis I clarify the importance of implementing global initiatives in the face of technological advances to narrow the divide between those with access and those without.

All Ways of Loving (AWOL) shaping a student's college experience: The impact of an LGBT advocacy group's influence on identity

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Abstract .

Drawing from Sartre's and Goffman's theories regarding identity construction, the purpose of this study is to examine how affirmation assists the identity development of sexual minorities. The identity is a more fluid aspect of a person, which is increasingly true for those who are considered to live outside of the societal norm, because they struggle to negotiate self-presentation with societal expectations. For the sexual minority youth, this is especially true; and existing research suggests that many educational institutions have limitations in regards to general informational and emotional support. For this reason, affirmation groups for sexual minority youth are found to assist self-acceptance, identity assumption, and identity commitment. Past research has explored the impact of social support from high school institutions, though little research has been done to show how a group of like-minded college students can act as a social support system. Research suggests that to identify with a group is beneficial to anyone of minority status, since it gives members a sense of validation; increased access to information; generally aids self-acceptance; and eventual individual identity development. This study argues that participating in AWOL is helpful to sexual minority students in developing their personal identity and feelings of safety.

Using the data from three focus groups to explore the effect that affirmation groups in colleges can have on their sexual minority population. This study specifically targets students that participate in AWOL and self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, pansexual, or polyamorous. It was found that while AWOL does not solve all the problems that sexual minorities experience at college, students who participated found themselves to be more secure throughout their college experience and felt empowered to influence change.

Call me Ganymede: A Feminist Critique Using Bormann's Fantasy Theme Analysis

of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

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Abstract

Elizabethan England's theater differs from contemporary theater. In the Elizabethan Era, it was conventional to witness young boys in female roles. Since females did not appear on the stage at all, young boys would dress in female clothing to portray the other gender. This gender switching from the male actor to the female character was even further challenged in some of Shakespeare's later comedies. The female characters often took on a masculine disguise. This meant that young male actors played a female character that then cross-dressed as a man in order to move the plot forward or achieve an objective. In *As You Like It,* this gender switching is iconic in Rosalind's character. There is a young boy actor playing Rosalind, who then gender switches to a young boy, Ganymede. Ganymede represents a second imaginary "Rosalind" in order to get closer to Orlando and then switches back to his role as the male Ganymede and the female Rosalind.

Bormann's work with fantasy-theme analysis argues that an audience shares a rhetorical vision: a shared belief among a community of people triggered by a word or phrase from the rhetor (Foss 123). For an Elizabethan audience, I argue that Shakespeare's choice of language creates a shared rhetorical vision about the complexity of gender switching. Through a feminist lens, I apply a fantasy theme analysis to understand the shared rhetorical vision on gender and gender switching in *As You Like It*. Patriarchal themes helped to assist the young boy actors in playing feminine roles that involved gender switching. With the elimination of some patriarchal conventions, contemporary women have a harder time playing some of the roles that these young boys mastered. Additionally, contemporary females playing these roles do not suggest the homoerotic feelings to the audience and other actors. Further research is focused on contemporary renditions of *As You Like It* to examine the modern complexity of gender switching characters.

Social Media and Rural Healthcare: A Data Analysis of its Relevancy and Role in a Small Community

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Abstract

Social media has become an increasingly powerful tool utilized by today's business world. Its exponential growth and popularity is becoming of greater interest to healthcare systems. It is slowly changing how healthcare systems communicate within their organization and with their consumers. Acknowledging social media's expanding acceleration, hospitals in rural communities are starting to pay attention. Recognizing that rural communities are unique in their technological use, exploring how they use it and what they use it for requires further study. My research explores a rural community's use of social media in the particular area of healthcare. Using social capital theory to guide my discussion, I investigate a small hospital in a rural community's place in the social media world, and explore how their healthcare system can benefit from its use.

To address this issue, I administered a twelve question survey distributed to individuals in the rural community of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania with a response rate of 337 people. I analyze this survey and conduct a data analysis that interprets the responses of the survey in a meaningful way. This survey aims to gain a better understanding of how a small community utilizes social media in regard to healthcare, and tackles the issue of its relevancy. I argue that social media has a beneficial place in rural healthcare and can be utilized by healthcare systems to increase social capital. I suggest ways in which healthcare systems can engage their rural communities through social media networks.

(242 words)

The "I" of Malala: A Cluster-Agon Analysis of Malala Yousafzai as an Activist for the Education of Young Girls

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Abstract

Malala Yousafzai, just 17 years old in July of 2014 has been named one of "The Most Influential People in the World in 2014" by Time Magazine, projected her message to thousands in the United Nations, and earned the title of the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. She has quickly become an international symbol for human rights, specifically the education of young girls and women.

Using Cluster-Agon Analysis, I investigate two speech artifacts for the purpose of understanding Malala's attitude and motive. As Kenneth Burke states, "Language reflects, selects, and deflects meaning as a way of shaping the symbol systems that allow us to cope with the world." Malala utilizes language in a compelling way that comes across as humble and sincere, while using her own hardships as an empathetic and symbolic construction to unite people globally towards a common goal. I conduct a sensitive textual analysis of Malala's language in her speech to the United Nations Youth Assembly on July 12, 2013, as well as her more recent Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech on October 10, 2014. I argue that through her speeches, a tension arises between her self-referencing use of "I" and her inclusive use of "we" and that Malala emerges as a key symbol that encapsulates the more general struggle for girls' education. I explore and connect the ideas and themes that frequent these speeches by using the key terms: "I," "We," "Rights," "Taliban," "God," and "Voice." By attending to the frequency and intensity of her language use, the textual analysis reveals her god and devil terms and ultimately, her attitude. A rhetorical perspective of language as symbolic action significantly contributes to a more concrete understanding of how her style and focused message is so powerful and persuasive.

Index Words: Education, Malala Yousafzai, Human rights, women, girls, cluster-agon, rhetoric, language, symbols.

The capacity of the visual arts to destroy cultural and generational compartmentalization: An alternative to verbal language, which induces "the negative"

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John Dewey argues in the *Art as Experience* lecture series that the enemy of humanity's natural state is language: language can be just as bad as it can be good. Language allows tasks to be completed with a sense of urgency and efficiency, but with this efficiency comes a loss: society forgets that each individual has not only a unique identity but also a unique viewpoint. That, somehow, even those who share the same "identity" through self-identification by language, whether it be race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, have completely different experiences with the world around them. In an effort to communicate, Language does not take into account this unique experience. However, as Dewey details time-and-time again, art does.

This research seeks to reveal the consistent drawbacks of language as a limiting medium of expression. In the long run, language has done more damage to the human psyche across each generation by separating us from our natural human condition. Society has forgotten what it means to be part of a natural process, instead opting to be ruled by the artificial selfhoods symbols provide us. However, art plays a role in the long-term opposition of language. Art has the capacity to showcase a culture's attitudes, values, and beliefs, therefore their experiences as well, without the necessity of translation or previous knowledge of said culture. A medium accessible to all, art has become a driving force in breaking boundaries, reminding society that even with our newfound "individuality" all humans are capable of engaging in art.

Through an analysis of John Dewey's argument in *Art as Experience* where he presents the increasingly dangerous phenomenon he calls, "the Human Contribution," I use this work to explain the genuine importance of an undivided, complete world experience and art's role over language, in supplying one. This research details what it means to be "inventors of the negative," as Kenneth Burke deemed a defining characteristic of language users. I then argue that society has used language as a crutch forsaking holistic understanding for efficiency and introduce the long and short-term benefits of both mediums: art and language. Through a concise review of *The Fallen Angels* by Salvatore Albano, among other works, I argue Dewey's Human Contribution is attainable and understandable. As a consequence, I conclude that society has an obligation to itself to invest in art. This investment in art has more worth to society's well being, as it creates a holistic understanding on the communal and individual level, across cultures and generations.

Political Dialects: A qualitative analysis of perceived bias in Democratic and Republican speech

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Abstract

In American politics, the success of a political party depends on how its candidates communicate their values. Party identification hinges largely on narrative outlook and issue ownership. The two main political parties, Republican and Democrat, separate from each other by selecting different values and issues to call their own. Naturally, each party has developed a separate language to frame political issues in a way that highlights the strengths and downplays the weaknesses of their party. Partisan language is perpetuated through the way politicians speak and how the media frames political issues. Voters identify with a particular party by adopting this language into their own discussions.

Of all of the political issues, fiscal policy is arguably one with the clearest division between Republicans and Democrats. To put in very basic terms, Republicans are against raising taxes, and Democrats believe that channeling revenue into social programs helps improve the economy. Although fiscal policy is a key dividing issue, the language used to discuss it is usually vague, and can sound similar across party lines.

This study explores the way partisan voters talk about the economy and the extent to which perceived bias can hinder bipartisan communication. For my research, I interview voters who identify with one of the two main political parties: Republicans, and Democrats. Each participant is asked to read a paragraph about taxes and the economy that contains words used by the opposite party. I selected the words from speeches by Republican and Democratic politicians. Words with similar meaning are substituted in for one another, so that Democrats read the Republican words and Republicans read those associated with Democrats. Participants are asked to identify the bias of the paragraph; circle words that they feel are biased, and explain what the words mean to them.

I hypothesize that partisan voters will be able to identify the correct bias of a paragraph, but will experience difficulty in attempting to point out specific biased words. I infer that voters who are active in politics are able to determine bias based on a "gut feeling" that comes from absorbing partisan discussion in the media. This research is important to the study of bipartisan communication, which is becoming increasingly more difficult. This study contributes to a greater understanding of ways that Republicans and Democrats frame an economic issue that matters to an effective American politics.

A fantasy theme analysis of crisis communication management in social media: how joining the conversation saved the reputations of the Red Cross and FedEx

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The debate whether or not businesses should create social media accounts to connect with consumers is over. As of 2014, 93% of marketers use social media for businesses in the United States. Research has proven social media participation positively influences relationships between consumers and organizations. But what happens when these accounts are abused? By using Bormann's fantasy theme analysis, I examine the rhetoric of mission and vision statements crafted by the American Red Cross and FedEx in order to piece together their individual shared rhetorical visions the organizations create to bond with their consumers and shareholders. I then explore their social media mishaps that devalue and discernibly raises question among followers regarding each company's reputation. I analyze the crisis communication executed to revive the fantasy themes necessary for symbolic re-convergence.

With the Red Cross I examine their Twitter feed for the month of February 2011, as well as every public tweet containing the hashtag #gettingslizzard from the time of the mishap to the present. With FedEx I examine a YouTube video created by a disgruntled consumer as well as the video response created by the CEO of FedEx. To finalize my research, I analyze the crisis communication implemented through the lens of fantasy theme analysis, which reveals how re-convergence can occur.

The constraints and speed of social media have changed the face of PR and crisis communication. I argue that the implementation of effective PR and crisis communication are more imperative than ever in repairing and reviving the shared rhetorical visions that have been challenged through these social media crises. Joining the dialogue gives organizations the ability to change the direction of the conversation. I argue through appropriately executed crisis communication the American Red Cross and FedEx turned mishaps into opportunities to create new constructs for symbolic re-convergence with their followers.

Does "IT" Still Matter:
A Narrative Approach Exploring the Dynamic Definition of Virginity in the Formation of Women's Sexual Identity

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Abstract:

Across cultures throughout the world, virginity is considered one of the most cherished possessions a young woman can have. Within our society, the emphasis on maintaining virginity has been a perceived female value. Previous studies have examined the impact on the loss of virginity; however, there has been a lack of discourse surrounding what this "possession" is. Research suggests that the loss of virginity can be characterized as a gift to give to a partner, a stigma to rid oneself of, or a rite of passage to adulthood (Carpenter, 2010). Although the classification of the loss of virginity can provide insight, it is the language involved in the narrative that proves to be of greater importance to the construction of a young woman's identity with regard to sexuality and virginity. More specifically, how has the narrative of remaining chaste been perpetuated throughout decades? Previous research proposes that earlier generations stressed sexual constraints for young women, yet newer evidence argues that the percentage of young women having pre-marital sex before the age of 20 years old has not altered from the 1950s to present day (Schalet, 2009).

In this research, the objective is to explore how a definition of virginity is sustained over time through an investigation of the narratives used to describe sexual experiences. The rhetorical assumption is that the stories surrounding the "loss of virginity," specifically language, construct a woman's sexual identity. To create a clearer understanding of the narrative by which woman are expected to live, I examine the discourse surrounding virginity across six decades from a generational perspective in three interviews. I conducted these three in-depth interviews with each woman representing a specific generation. I interviewed white, middle class, heterosexual women who are classified members of the Baby Boomer generation, Generation X, and Generation Y.

Using these interviews as my data set, I apply Walter Fisher's narrative approach to assess the narrative rationality of these women's stories. I argue that the narrative rationality of these women's stories remain complete and true to society's expectations despite that contemporary society allows for greater expressions of differences about virginity. The narratives surrounding virginity offer an illustration of the standard created by society in constraining a woman's sexual identity. Further research is needed to clarify the variations between ethnicity, previous education, and socio-economic status among the women interviewed.

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