MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

A Pit-bull in Lipstick: The Reciprocal Brand Rhetoric of Sarah Palin

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Introduction

This Major Research paper will focus on the Republican American politician Sarah Palin. Sarah Palin is a political figure who has played an interesting role in Republican politics over the last four years. As an unexpected candidate for John McCain's 2008 Vice Presidential nomination, Palin garnered unprecedented media attention for a running mate. Sarah Palin is a media celebrity, a potential Republican candidate for the 2012 election, and an international household name. The purpose of this research is to explore Sarah Palin as a political actor and celebrity icon by analyzing her use of new media as a platform for her political rhetoric. Specifically, this study looks at the discourse used in Sarah Palin's social media campaign, with a direct focus on the social media outlet of Facebook. Facebook is a non-traditional political media platform, which allows politicians contact with millions of users in a format that is social, personal and direct. Many politicians have been utilizing new media platforms in order to communicate their political messages to new and diverse audiences. This study analyzes how Sarah Palin is utilizing the medium of Facebook, and how the language she uses in communicating to her supporters affects their experience of current political events. This study aims to show the relationship between the rhetoric she chooses to employ, and the comment activity of her supporters on Facebook. Selections of Sarah Palin's Facebook Note documents were chosen in order to narrow the scope of this research. The research questions that has directed this study is:

Through the social media platform of Facebook, what function does Palin's use of metaphor play in the reciprocal discourse of supporter comments? Do literary

devices such as metaphor affect the nature of audience participation in political

social media?

First, I discuss the *political climate* from which Sarah Palin as a political actor has arisen. Second, I explore the relationship between *new media and politics* in the context of Sarah Palin's career. I then define and discuss the research methodology and theoretical orientation of this study, and key literature that has influenced the direction of my research. Finally, I explain the data coding and analysis process and suggest recommendations for further research in this area.

Political Climate

This section provides context to the current American political climate, and also provides an historical perspective on how Sarah Palin has become such an influential figure in American Republican politics. For the purposes of this research, it is necessary to contextualize the political climate within which Sarah Palin has created her discourse in order to properly assess the reception of Palin's message.

Sarah Palin is currently playing a pivotal role in American politics as a woman, Republican, and as a media figure. Her influential status is defined not only by her unexpected rise to political fame, but also by her ability to embrace the media and its many forms so thoroughly, as few politicians before her have done. Sarah Palin was the elected mayor of Wasilla, Alaska in 1996, Palin's first serious role in American politics. In 2004 Palin ran for lieutenant governor of Alaska but was unsuccessful (Cooper). In 2006 Sarah Palin was elected as the first female governor of Alaska. After only serving

two years in office as a governor, Palin was chosen by Republican Presidential Candidate John McCain to serve as his Vice Presidential running mate for the 2008 election (Cooper). As a relatively unknown politician outside of Alaska, Palin's Vice Presidential nomination took the nation by surprise. The nomination garnered unprecedented media attention in both traditional political media platforms, and also on comedy news programming, websites, new media outlets and social media platforms. Since her introduction in 2008, Palin has proved to be a pervasive media phenomenon, from the *Saturday Night Live* comedy sketches, tabloid frenzy, Palin's reality television show on *The Learning Channel*, to a traditional news interview with reporter Katie Couric. Her clear willingness to work with the media, particularly through the adoption of her own reality television show, illustrates Palin's distinct position as a politician willing to do things differently and who brings with her unique methods of approaching the political arena.

In a chapter entitled *Sarah Palin, or How not to be a Feminist,* Nina Power examines Sarah Palin's public character, and specifically how she embraces the dualities of "womaness". She is both attractive and successful, a mother and a politician, sexy and powerful (Power). This new all-encompassing idea of what a woman can be in the public eye is both liberating and scary for the American public. Palin has the uncanny ability to brand not only her personal successes, but also her personal failures. Slips such as mistaking North Korea for South Korea only seem to strengthen her public persona. According to Power, Palin's branding strategy is adaptive in nature, allowing her to encompass both her successes and failures into creating her public persona:

"All her potential weaknesses only serve to make her more (super)human, more aggressively populist, more everywoman: the dynamics of her family life, her lack of experience, her hobbies and poses." (Power 9)

This study builds off of Power's analysis of Palin's brand identity, and focuses on how Palin's language is able to capture and hold the attention of her supporters.

Palin has managed to strategically analyze alternatives to traditional political platforms in order to build a relationship with her voters and allow them to believe that they are achieving a close personal connection to her. She has been particularly successful in creating this connection through her television series on TLC, entitled *Sarah Palin's Alaska* (Gilatto 2010). This "reality television" program serves as a 30 minute commercial for Palin's "Republican family values," not only allowing viewers to feel a personal connection with Palin, but allowing Palin to manipulate the media while illustrating her commitment to what could be considered a traditional Republican family lifestyle (Gilatto 2010). More importantly to this study, Palin has been active on social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook to connect with supporters while delivering her political messaging. Palin's Facebook page currently has 3, 176, 718 "likes", which constitutes a significant following on Facebook. A "like" signifies a users affiliation to a person or event. The small action of clicking "like" creates a digital connection between the user and the event or individual being "liked", as the action is posted publically on both users pages. Sarah Palin has published 324 short "Note" articles, many of which receive thousands of comments per day (Facebook 2011). Facebook Notes are short, 250-300 word articles written by a user on any subject matter of interest. These Notes are published publically to the user's Facebook wall or page, and can be read by their

"friends" or page supporters. Sarah Palin has actively engaged the platform of Facebook, publishing comments and Note articles consistently on a week to week basis.

Facebook and Politics

Digital social networking sites serve to connect individuals with communities of users who hold shared interests and beliefs. Facebook, a social networking site launched in 2004 by CEO Mark Zuckerberg, has become the networking website of choice for youth populations around the world. Facebook originally targeted undergraduate university students throughout North America, but due to widespread popularity and high demand Facebook systematically made the site available to international users. To appeal to this new international audience the site was translated into 70 different languages (Facebook 2011). In addition, Facebook began to market the site to a wider age demographic. Consequently, the Facebook community has become a large, active and powerful network consisting of 750 million people, approximately 50% of which sign in on any given day (Facebook 2011). Facebook provides users with a new method to communicate and connect to others socially.

As well as being an active networking site for individuals, Facebook allows users to create groups, events and fan pages that provide further networking opportunities for previously unconnected individuals. The average Facebook user is connected to 80 groups, which demonstrates the networking site's capacity to digitally link existing social connections, but also provides a platform to form new social connections (Facebook 2011). The group function on Facebook allows for the creation of digital communities.

These groups may be open or closed, and allow users to connect through the sharing of posts, links, photos, videos, questions, or documents. Further, they provide instant messaging group chats, which allow users to interact with each other instantaneously. These groups are wide-ranging, from celebrity fan pages, to political mobilization (Panagopoulos 2009). Ultimately, Facebook is changing the way in which individuals interact socially and engage in communities of shared interest (Panagopoulos 2009).

Politicians are beginning to comprehend the importance of social networking sites such as Facebook, and are utilizing these digital communities to rally political support. Williams and Gulati indicate that Facebook is factor that can affect the outcome of a national election:

> "At a minimum, it (the study) demonstrates that social network support, on Facebook specifically constitutes an indicator of candidate viability of significant importance in races of various types for both the general electorate and even more so for the youngest age demographics." (Williams, Gulati 284)

In this quote Williams and Gulati assert that a politician's social media presence will have an impact on their public persona. Politicians are then able to control this impact strategically, either themselves or through the use of a social media team in charge of managing the politician's social media page for them. Further, this quote illustrates that younger generations of voters will be most heavily influenced by the new media presence of a politician. These findings are particularly important when applied to Palin's use of

social media as they illustrate the importance of this social media adoption in engaging youth voters throughout the country.

The use of Facebook can also create unforeseen complications when used as a platform for political campaigning. Facebook is a heavily active medium where anyone can comment on any text, photo or video they find on the website. This leaves politicians exposed to the possibility of negative attention and attacks from opposing political groups or individuals. Though there is potential for negative publicity from all forms of media, the ease of posting information to large audiences on Facebook makes this particular medium especially difficult to manage. The method with which Palin's social media managers combat this negative attention is through rallying the supporter base to pressure unsupportive parties out of the discussion. Any negative comment received on Palin's Facebook page is quickly berated by her support network, and pushed off of the main page. This ensures that negative comments do not garner strength, and are instead quickly quelled.

Facebook is a necessary tool to study when looking at the change in political connection from traditional platforms to new media digitized platforms. Social media platforms are opening up new space for citizens to engage in political action, and rally social networks of support. This medium allows individuals to find other like-minded Facebook users and share opinions, information, and photos. These Facebook pages creates a powerful political force, even amongst individuals with moderate to low levels of political engagement, particularly as all political action evidenced within the group is being conducted through the comfort of each individuals home. These media also open up space for political propaganda and the manipulation of audiences. Unlike television

and other traditional mediums in which politicians are portrayed as separate from their audience, on Facebook politicians are portrayed on the medium in the same way as the public. This allows for increased feelings of identification, similarity, and ultimately support. This study looks at how political rhetoric is used through the medium of Facebook, and how different rhetorical devices can effect supporter participation in the politician's online network.

Literature Review

   This review looks at key literature that has contributed to the analysis of Sarah

Palin's political rhetoric. I have divided the review into five sections based on the content

of each text. *The Political Celebrity* section looks at literature focused on Sarah Palin as a

media phenomenon and American celebrity. The second section, *The Networked*

Campaign, looks at texts that discuss how social networks have changed the nature of

political campaigning and created a new platform for citizen democratic engagement. The

fourth section titled, *Facebook Gets Political*, looks at research specifically focused on

the social network Facebook. This section analyzes literature focused on how Facebook

has been used by American politicians in past elections. The fourth section *Political*

Rhetoric, looks at literature focused on how politicians use rhetoric to persuade and

motivate citizens to support their campaigns. The final section of this Literature Review

discusses two authors whose work on Discourse Analysis directed the design of the

methodology for this research. Through choosing texts that deal with these five themes,

this study has been able to comprise a thorough background of relevant information

regarding Sarah Palin's, political language and the use of new media in political

campaigns.

Political Celebrity

In *Obama, Palin and Weber: Charisma and Social Change in the 2008 U.S Election* Gary Bowden looks at Barack Obama and Sarah Palin's specific rhetorical styles in comparison with the traditional Weberian notion of "charisma". Rhetorical analysis was conducted to determine if Palin and Obama exhibited charisma in the contexts of their political media platforms. The article compares and contrasts Obama and Palin's rhetorical strategies to determine the different audiences targeted by each candidate, and how those audiences affected constructions of authoritative charisma. This research provides necessary orientation for this research, which aids in establishing context of political rhetoric employed by Palin in the 2008 election. This article is also significant because it looks not just at rhetoric, but analyzes the audience Palin is speaking to. The article discusses how Obama was able to reach an independent audience of historically non-voters, while Palin's rhetoric only resonated with those who already identified as Republican. This study builds off of the analysis of charismatic rhetoric, and specifically how audiences respond to certain literary devices through social media.

The Palin Effect and Vote Preference in the 2008 Presidential Election by Kate Kenski provides some interesting background on Sarah Palin as a political figure on the Republican stage. This article looks at how the Vice Presidential candidates affected voter preferences, and specifically at how Sarah Palin influenced the outcome of the 2008 election. Kenski provides a thorough background of the role vice presidential candidates have played throughout history and outlines why Vice Presidential candidates are so important in modern day American politics. Sarah Palin was characterized as a "game changer" in the McCain campaign, garnering more media attention than any other

candidate. Kenski calls this "the Palin effect". The author provides a content analysis of media stories aired and printed shortly after the candidates were chosen, showing the unprecedented media attention focused on Palin. This article analyses Palin's notoriety in the media and celebrity creation, two very topical issues when looking at the use of social media for supporter commentary.

Gibson and Heyse's article *The Difference Between a Hockey mom and a Pit Bull* is a study focusing on Palin's acceptance speech from her 2008 Vice Presidential nomination. This study looks directly at the rhetoric Palin employs in her public addresses and focused on how Palin is able to appeal to her audience as a maternal, feminine character while still employing masculine and traditionally patriarchal rhetorical devices. Gibson and Heyse pinpoint five dominant rhetorical devices that characterize hegemonic masculinity: physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy and heterosexuality. The authors discuss how Palin, as a female politician has the ability to challenge some of these heteronormative political devises. In the research for this study it is clear that Palin employs untraditional rhetorical devices when speaking to her supporters, however Gibson and Heyse point out that much of her rhetoric still plays into the five hegemonic masculine rhetorical devices. In their study they found that Palin's rhetoric not only plays into these devices, but also serves to reinforce dominate patriarchal values (Gibson, Heys 238). According to the research done on this speech, Palin feminizes her opponents, characterizing Obama as an incompetent wimp and reinforcing the "warrior" hyper masculine nature of John McCain. Gibson and Heyse also reference Palin's identification statements. Her identification statements serve to connect her to the "everyman" by using slang terms; analogies and using southern jargon to

further relate to and connect with her audience. These findings are very important to this research on the rhetoric of Sarah Palin in her social media campaigns, as it provides a framework of Palin's past rhetoric from which this research can move to digital platforms.

The Networked Campaign

The above section addressed literature about Sarah Palin as a media icon and political celebrity. This section, The Networked Campaign, moves away from Palin as a political celebrity and focuses on research conducted on the topics of social media network's influence on the political sphere in America. The analysis in this section is necessary to this study of Sarah Palin's Facebook campaign as it introduces social media as a platform for political campaigning. Though Palin embraces social media as a campaign tool more enthusiastically than her political counterparts, she is not the first politician to utilize social media. The studies discussed in this section look at social media as a tool for campaigning, and assess the past use of these tools by politicians. The research described in this section influenced the direction of my research methodology on Sarah Palin's Facebook discourse.

The Pastor in the Basement: Discourses of Authenticity in the Networked Public Sphere by Kevin Healy looks at how new media are providing innovative platforms for political discussion and influence, with a specific focus on the religious right. This article is interesting as it examines the social impacts of these new media, and their consequences for the public perception of religion, a topic highlighted in all of Palin's

communication. Healy argues that as a result of the plethora of information made available on a candidate through these new media sources, religion serves as a tipping point to prove trustworthiness and ethicality. Healey calls this a "flat" notion of political authenticity, and discusses how arguments of religion can serve to mask arguments of race and class. As in Bowden's article, Healey looks at how the introduction of social media into campaigns changed the way in which political messages were communicated to digital audiences. Healey discusses how new media is "resuscitating" the religious conservative right, in creating a public sphere for the discussion of conservative issues. As new media makes information available, communities of thought can develop. Palin's Facebook following can be described as a community of like minded citizens who are absorbing the information and up taking the rhetoric of a charismatic conservative political figure.

In Rahaf Harfoush's book *Yes we did: an inside look at how social media built the Obama brand* social media is analyzed as a device that was a key component of Obama's 2008 presidential win. Harfoush examines how the "Students for Obama" Facebook group created a community of youth students who rallied around the digital platform to host events, raise campaign funds and increase the youth Obama movement. Harfoush discusses social media in political campaigns as a media that engages the everyday person and creates a space for people who are new to politics, or previously unengaged in their democratic process to discuss and debate political issues in a way that saves face. Harfoush cites the ability of social media to "personalize the experience" of politics for supporters, something that is tapped into through this study of Palin's Facebook supporter comments (Harfoush 15). Supporters feel that they can personally engage in the

discussion, and connect in a meaningful way to their politician of choice. Harfoush

mirrors Healy's research, as they both discuss the creation of a new political public

sphere that can engage new audiences and provide a richer experience for the democratic

process.

Facebook Gets Political

The last section discussed social media as a new platform for democratic action.

This section builds off of the literature reviewed in *The Networked Campaign* section to

focus specifically on the platform of Facebook. Research reviewed in this section looks at

Facebook as it has been used in past political campaigns, and offers some pointed

discussion about the relevance of Facebook in politics.

Woolley, Limperos and Oliver's article titled *The 2008 Presidential Election, 2.0:*

A Content Analysis of User-Generated Political Facebook Groups builds off of Healy's

notions of social media as a tool to create political networked public sphere. This

research focuses on Facebook pages that were created in the time of the 2008 election, in

support of both Barack Obama and John McCain. This research focuses on the ability for

Facebook groups to effect political mobilization, and asks the question "To what extent

do user-generated political Face- book groups facilitate political discourse?" (Woolley

Limperos Oliver 633) Building on the notion that Facebook groups can be a medium for

political discourse, the researchers focused on what kinds of rhetoric the contributors

were using in their Facebook comments. The researchers used three categories to analyze

their data, the categories being profanity, discussions of religion, race, age related

references, and positive vs. negative discourse in their discussions about the candidates. The study highlights the active nature of Facebook discussions in American political spheres, and the content analysis specifically examines the type of discourse used by the commenters to discuss policy. This research is directly related to the study of Palin's supporter comments, as it paves the way for further social media, and Facebook specific content analysis for political relevance. The content analysis used for this research project is very similar to this study surrounding the follower activity and commentary of Sarah Palin's supporters.

In Panagopoulos's text *Politiking Online* he dedicated a chapter to "Friending the President" where he examines the use of Facebook by American presidential candidates in 2008, looking closely at profiles and group affiliation. Panagopoulous took conclusions from this research that are heavily relevant to this study. The author concluded that Facebook's core base of users are between the ages of 18-24, an age demographic that has been notoriously underrepresented in the voting population. As a political communication tool, Facebook allows a means of direct communication with a population previously unengaged in politics. Facebook provides these potential voters information through a medium that is easily understood and interpreted by youth voters; Panagopoulous calls this messaging "Quick information and instant gratification" (Panagopoulos 262). The author cites the global nature of Facebook as a problem for assessing its actual impact on the turnout of a campaign. People from other countries can easily "friend" a candidate, and post comments on their wall. These individuals skew the data, and make Facebook data analysis more complicated and inconclusive. The

nationality of any commenter or "friend" is of great interest when assessing the impact of social media use by politicians.

Political Rhetoric

In the fourth section, *Facebook Gets Political*, literature discussing the use of Facebook as a platform for political engagement was analyzed and applied to the present discussion of Sarah Palin's social media rhetoric. The present discussion on Palin looks at the language employed by Palin to optimize the use of social media in her political campaign. The *Political Rhetoric* section of this literature review looks at literature that analyzes the rhetoric of conservative politics. This section builds off of the analysis of social media in politics to looks specifically at how politicians have used and manipulated rhetorical devices in a variety of mediums in order to garner political support.

George Lakeoff's study entitled *Metaphor, Morality and Politics: Or Why Conservatives Have Left Liberals in the Dust* looks at how metaphor is used by the conservative, and republican parties to rally citizen support. Lakeoff cites five forms of metaphor most often employed by the Conservative parties, or what he calls "Moral Schemes" (Lakoff, 179). These five metaphors make up the bulk of conservative rhetoric, and play upon an accounting metaphor of debts and payments. The five schemes are Reciprocation, Retribution, Revenge, Restitution and Altruism. Palin often employs these value exchange metaphors when she is speaking about military action or the economy. Lakoff also discusses how conservatives view morality in terms of metaphor. According

to Lakoff, here is a strength, weakness metaphor when it comes to personal morality. Strength combats evil (moral fiber, backbone) and doing evil deeds is seen as "falling" (Lakoff 184). Through this metaphor, evil and good are seen on binary terms. There is no compromise when it comes to evil, it must be attacked. These metaphors of good and evil can be seen riddled throughout Palin's discourse when she thanks the American people for hunting down the enemy:

> "It's a testament to the hard work and dedication of these brave Americans who relentlessly hunted down our enemy." (Sarah Palin 2011)

In this quote we can see Palin's good/evil metaphor play out. She is positioning the American people as the good crusaders hunting Bin Laden, the evil enemy. Lakoff's work contributes to this study by illuminating some key metaphors most often used in the rhetoric of right wing politicians. This study looks beyond the metaphor, and assesses the effect on audience participation and engagement in the rhetoric based on the metaphor used.

The second article that examines the elements of discourse used by conservative politicians comes from Norman Fairclough's text *Language and Power.* Within this text Fairclough includes a chapter titled *Creativity and Struggle in Discourse: the discourse of Thatcherism,* which discusses the conservative discourse of British politician Margaret Thatcher. In this article Fairclough investigates the production of texts for political purposes with a focus on the conscious or subconscious motivation behind their production. There are three methods through which motivation can be assessed and problemitized, through the contents, subjects or relations (Fairclough 141). The

motivation of the creator of the discourse can become problematic when they represent the world in a way that is not an accurate depiction of reality (Fairclough 141). The second method through which the producer of a text's motivations can become problematic is through their representation of relations. Fairclough gives the example of male-female discursive interaction, discussing that as women's subject positions toward men change and are contested these discursive relations change and become problemitized (Fairclough 141). The third and final element of discourse that can be manipulated by the producer is the subject position. The subject position or social identity of the producer can be manipulated through the way in which the discourse is constructed (Fairclough 141). Fairclough uses an example of political discourse, suggesting that a politician may manipulate their subject position in order to show a direct association with the values and beliefs audience (Fairclough 141). The article then discusses a case study analyzing conservative British politician Margaret Thatcher's discourse. There are three essential elements that compose Thatcher's "authoritarian populism" discourse. The first is a return to traditional right wing values of spending control, strong defense and union control (Fairclough 147). The second element of Thatcher's discourse is a dedication to neo-liberal ideals such as a free market economy. The third and final element is the appeal to populism, or an appeal to the ordinary citizen. Thatcher uses language to represent Britain as a nation of self-made citizens who oppose any state interference in their economy or private lives. The appeal to populism is an element of discourse widely used in Sarah Palin's right wing rhetoric. Palin often uses arguments consistent with Margaret Thatcher's elements of discourse; therefore Fairclough's work is very relevant to the study of Palin's rhetoric.

The above literature review offers a cross section of relevant research focused on Sarah Palin as a political celebrity, the use of social networks in political campaigns, Facebook as a new medium for political action, and the key linguistic devices employed by conservative politicians. This literature provides a necessary knowledge base for the present research on Sarah Palin's Facebook rhetoric for this study to build from in the Findings and Interpretation section of this paper.

The final section of this literature review looks at literature relating to Discourse Analysis. Discourse Analysis is the tool used to critically assess, explain and interpret linguistic practices. For this study, the work of two specific authors, Norman Fairclough and James Gee, was drawn on heavily in designing the methodology used to perform the discourse analysis. The section below discusses some key texts from each author that were integral in conducting this research.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a tool often utilized by researchers in order to assess the rhetorical devices of a person or a group. For this study, a discourse analysis was conducted using the "Note" content from Sarah Palin's Facebook page. Discourse analysis is a broad term for a set of practices used to describe, code and further interpret language. This research pulls heavily from Norman Fairclough's work on Discourse and Power. In his text *Language and Power*, Fairclough outlines three stages of critical discourse analysis: Description, Interpretation and Explanation (Fairclough, 21). Description consists of identifying the formal properties of the discourse. These

properties are the specific, quantifiable, and definite attributes of a text. Interpretation

consists of the process of determining the relationship between the text and the

interaction with the reader or listener. Lastly, explanation focuses on the relationship

between the text and the social context in which it is created (Fairclough 22).

In James Paul Gee's text *Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* Gee outlines

seven building tasks for language creation: significance, activities, identities,

relationships, politics, connections and signs and systems of knowledge. Significance

refers to how we use language in order to create meaning or value. In this study,

significance is determined by the subject matter and the style of commenter participation

(Gee 11). Activity refers to how we engage in certain types of activity using language as

a formal, or informal activity marker. Identity refers to how we use language to create

and foster a certain style of identity. In this study identity is particularly important when

examining how Palin chooses to use language in order to create her brand identity and

shape her supporters idea of what kind of woman she is both politically and personally.

The fourth discourse analysis Building Task defined by Gee is Relationships. In

interactions, we use language to signify our relationship to other people, or to create new

relationships. This is accomplished in a variety of ways, including the usage of in and out

group terminology, or the terms utilized by a writer when referring to their audience. The

next building task, Politics, is one of the most important building tasks to this study. Gee

cites that we use language to: "convey a perspective on the nature of, and distribution of

social goods" (Gee 12). It is evident to the reader that political discourse tools are the

most effective when analyzing Sarah Palin's writing, even in an informal medium such as

Facebook.

The next building task outlined by Gee is Connection. Language can be used to show connection between concepts, or can be used in order to create disconnect between objects, people or ideas. In her discourse, Palin can be seen using connection with her audience in order to distance herself from different institutions, including the media and the current political climate. She also frequently uses language to connect herself to the American people, create religious affiliation and to further brand herself as the "everywoman". The discussion of how Sarah Palin uses language in order to disconnect herself from specific institutions, events and individuals is further explored in the Findings and Interpretation section of this paper. The final building task is Signs and Systems of Knowledge. This task discusses how we can use language to privilege or disenfranchise systems of knowledge. Discourses can become privileged when audiences must have a certain membership of knowledge to understand the discourse, such as being a part of the medical or legal community. In Palin's texts we see distinct steps taken to move away from traditional political discourses that can be seen as privileged, in favor of the simplification of political language for mass appeal. Gee and Fairclough are two authors whose work has heavily influenced the direction of this research.

Methodology

This section discusses the methods of research that were developed to successfully analyze the rhetoric published on Sarah Palin's Facebook page. In order to further explore the research question, two hypotheses were developed. These two hypotheses further direct the research in this project and were developed by conducting a preliminary analysis of Sarah Palin's texts.

H1: Metaphors enable a diverse audience to relate easily to complex ideas and are therefore an effective rhetorical device when engaging an audience for political purposes

H2: Comments written by supporters will uptake key words and phrases from metaphors contained in Palin's writing, showing the creation of shared ideology

To test these hypotheses, a preliminary analysis of Sarah Palin's Note titled *Lamestream Media: Reload or White Flag?* posted March 24th 2011, was conducted. In this Note, Palin discusses media attacks against her politics, and compares the decision she is making about how to respond to media backlash one of choosing to "wave a white flag", or "reloading" (Palin 2011). The Note was coded for key operationalized terms and phrases. Some key words taken from Sarah Palin's metaphor were identified and operationalized through the coding process. The entire document, including all 2,035 comments was scanned for the identified key words in order to assess the significance of Palin's language in her user uptake. In this example the word *Reload* was repeated in supporter comments 163 times, the made up term *Lamestream* was repeated 67 times, the

acronym of *Lame Stream Media* (LSM) was repeated 28 times, references to the term *White Flag* were repeated 33 times, the term *Mosquito* was repeated 25 times, and references to the "ball" were repeated 25 times. (See Appendix A)

Based on this preliminary analysis, it was apparent that Palin's readers are not only absorbing her rhetoric, but also reproducing it in their responses to her opinions. The findings of the preliminary analysis focused the direction of this research and lead to the creation of key operationalized definitions to further direct the scope of this analysis.

This study employs Norman Fairclough's conception of metaphor as a rhetorical tool for relating experience and as a literary tool that simplifies complex ideas. In his text *Language as Power* Fariclough discusses how metaphors are used to explain experience:

"Metaphor is a means of representing one aspect of experience in terms of another, and is by no means restricted to the sort of discourse it tends to be stereotypically associated with- poetry and literary discourse." (Fairclough 99)

In order to fully showcase the reciprocal relationship social media can create between writers and responders, this study analyzes strong metaphors created by Sarah Palin, and their effect on the audience comment responses.

Five key terms are used throughout this study: power, discourse, rhetoric, new media and uptake. To maintain clarity in the analysis, the operationalized definitions have been outlined below so they can be properly interpreted throughout the duration of this research.

Term	Definition
Rhetoric	Rhetoric is defined by Aristotle as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion." (Aristotle,123) For this study rhetoric is defined as a method of communication that employs linguistic devices to influence or persuade.
Power	In Fairclough's text *Language and Power,* he defines power as having two levels, one of physical force and one of manufacturing consent through the use of ideology (Fairclough 3). For this study Power is defined as a means of manufacturing consent through the use of language.
Discourse	In his text *Discourses* David Howarth defines Discourse in the following way: "discourses are means for different forces to advance their interests and projects, while also providing points of resistance for counter-strategies to develop" (Howarth 49). For this study Discourse is defined as the mechanism used in persuasion.
New Media	For this study New Media is defined as digital platforms emerging within the last 10 years, which allow for new means of communication between individuals and networks.
Uptake	For this study uptake refers to the acquisition of another's language to describe events, people or circumstances.
Metaphor	This study will employ Fairclough's definition of Metaphor taken from the text *Language and Power*: "Metaphor is a means of representing one aspect of experience in terms of another, and is by no means restricted to the sort of discourse it tends to be stereotypically associated with- poetry and literary discourse." (Fairclough 99)

Table 1

The above definitions guide my analysis and provide further clarification of the methodology and findings for this Major Research Project.

This study shows how discourse analysis can be applied in an online setting, where information is in constant flux and comments are live to the public. Facebook is in a constant state of evolution and movement, and therefore this research had to marry traditional forms of discourse analysis with more current digital forms of analysis. Facebook is a live platform, and therefore it is likely that users may delete, alter or update their information as they conform to the pressures of a digital social environment. For this research, screen shots were taken of each Note posting, and the user comments to follow in order to keep the analysis consistent over time. This methodology utilized screen shots rather then the use of printouts. Using screen shots allowed the coding to be conducted on a digital platform, where it could be studied and viewed it in its original form. This method also allowed me to view the dates and times the users interacted with the information posted on Palin's Facebook, showing the instant nature of this medium.

In order to conduct a quantitative analysis of the uptake of Palin's rhetoric by her Facebook commenters, it was necessary to first assess the content of Palin's Facebook Notes for metaphor and strong rhetorical devices. The second step in the process was to code language used in the thousands of supporter comments for language uptake. Ten documents were chosen from Sarah Palin's Facebook "Notes". It was necessary to keep the number of documents used for coding low, based on the scope of this project, as the number of comments on each article ranged from two to five thousand comments each. The 10 documents chosen for coding and analysis were determined based on the date of publication and subject matter discussed. The date of publication was important in

choosing the most current articles published by Sarah Palin, in order to keep the research timely and relevant to the current political climate. The 10 articles have been divided into two different categories for analysis:

Policy: Articles having to do with current political affairs including economic issues, international affairs and domestic American policy. Most of the articles selected for this category directly refer to current policy created and implemented by the Barak Obama administration.

Personal: This category includes articles directly relating to the personal and family life of Sarah Palin. These articles are used to establish a connection with the audience by relating on a personal or familial basis.

After the articles were categorized, they were then coded for use of strong rhetoric and metaphor likely to strike a chord with Sarah Palin's audience. The coding process involved the identification of strong rhetorical devices used by Palin in her Facebook notes and selecting key words from the rhetorical device for coding. The coding process involved scanning the thousands of user comments in the 10 documents for rhetorical uptake. The documents were created from January- June 2011 and were chosen to show a broad scope of political and personal topics addressed. Uptake, as defined in the operational definitions refers to the acquisition of another's language to describe events, people or circumstances. The language uptake was quantified into graphs to show how often supporters reiterate Palin's language directly back to her. The data was then assessed by what subject matter audiences were more likely to engage, personal vs. political and then in to further categories based on the specific policy or event being

discussed. The successful metaphors were then assessed for common linguistic elements.

From these successful metaphors three consistent themes emerged.

Findings and Interpretation

The Findings and Interpretation section will discuss the findings of the research conducted through coding the uptake of metaphors of Sarah Palin's social media language. As stated in the Introduction of this paper, the research question guiding this work is:

Through the social media platform of Facebook, what function does Palin's use of metaphor play in the reciprocal discourse of supporter comments? Do literary devices such as metaphor affect the nature of audience participation in political social media?

In order to assess the way in which literary devices affect user participation, this section will assess the user uptake of Sarah Palin's language, and the results of the data coding conducted on 10 of Palin's articles. Three significant themes these metaphors have in common have been drawn out and assessed for significance of the style of language common to these successful metaphors. Ten documents were carefully coded, and 16,692 user comments were assessed for rhetoric uptake. These comments were processed using a key word find program, which located up to 100 the chosen terms at a time to assess user uptake in the user comments.

Sarah Palin's use of metaphor and strong discursive language played an integral part in the user engagement with the content of the Note. The literary devices used in Palin's Facebook "Note" rhetoric had a direct influence on the quantity of users who reiterated the language through their comments. When assessing this research it is prudent to address the idea of metaphor as more than just a linguistic device. We use

metaphor to describe experience, both consciously and subconsciously. Sarah Palin's discourse is riddled with many different styles of metaphor. Palin uses metaphor to simplify her political messages and create commonality with her readership by using their language. The reciprocal relationship created by users up taking Palin's language is more complex than just assessing metaphor. This research identified three distinct styles of metaphor that readers reiterated most frequently in their user comments. In assessing user uptake, common threads were found between these more successful and popular metaphors. Below some specific examples of these metaphors are demonstrated.

Three themes were prevalent when looking at which metaphors were successful in attracting user uptake. The first theme is Naming, or Character Attacks. Palin uses metaphor to create a narrative about Barak Obama through the use of her metaphor, and specifically her character attacks. The Character Attack section will delve further into this theme, providing statistics and examples of Palin's use of character attack metaphor. The second theme prevalent in Palin's writing is Simplicity. Palin creates metaphors which simplify complex American political issues and policy decisions to appeal to a largely uneducated supporter network. The third and final theme prevalent in Sarah Palin's successful metaphors is Populism. The metaphors most readily uptaken by her user commenters included the use of slang, made up terminology or a combination of slang and made up acronyms. The Findings and Interpretation section will assess the Frequency of Uptake from the documents coded for this study, and will describe each of the three themes prevalent in the successful use of metaphor in detail.

Frequency of Uptake

One of the goals of this research is to analyze the frequency of language uptake in reader responses to Sarah Palin's Facebook discourse. Uptake refers to the acquisition of another's language to describe events, people or circumstances. Frequency of uptake refers to the number of times readers or commenters reiterate the language of the discourse in the creation of their own texts. In the Literature Review section of this paper, James Paul Gee's work on Discourse Analysis is discussed in terms of the seven building tasks he outlines for discourse analysis. For this study, Gee's building task of Significance is assessed through analyzing frequency of uptake, as this practice determines what language is significant to Sarah Palin's audience. Significance characterized by how language is ascribed meaning by a population. For this research, the frequency of uptake is important when analyzing how the language of the text impacts the way in which a reader comprehends a situation, individual or event being discussed. When a reader directly uses the language of a politician, they are ascribing cultural significance to that representation of reality. The readers directly use the discourse of a politician to describe their own experience of an event or situation. The metaphors chosen for language uptake are significant, as they provide insight into the perceptions and understandings of the citizens using them. Showing the Frequency of Uptake allows analysis of the trends and patterns of which metaphors are chosen for reiteration. These patterns provide insight in to how citizens engage with politicians using social media.

For the purposes of this research, the frequency of user language uptake will function as a marker of success by Palin in connecting her message with her audience.

While language uptake is not the only marker of success when looking at political

rhetoric, for the purposes of this research the user uptake shows a direct correlation with

the message and the experience of the reader. When looking at Social Media applications,

comments are one of the predominant ways of studying the effect a message has on a user

population. The comments made on Sarah Palin's Facebook "Note" content provide

insight in to the most effective methods of communication for audience uptake on a

social media platform. Figure 1 represents coding collected for frequency of uptake for

Sarah Palin's Facebook Note content. The title, key words, and frequency of uptake are

represented below.

Article	Personal/Policy	Key Words	Uptake
On Sputnik vs. Spudnut	Policy	Sputnik Spudnut	182 users reiterated this language
Lame Duck President	Policy	Lame Duck	125 users reiterated this language
Another WTF Obama Foreign Policy Movement	Policy	WTF (winning the future)	700 users reiterated this language
The 4$ Per Gallon President	Policy	4.00 Gallon	377 users reiterated this language
Sugar Daddy's Run out of Sugar	Policy	Sugar Daddy	97 users reiterated this language
Removing the Boot From the Throat of American Businesses	Policy	Boot Throat	71 users reiterated this language
Lamestream Media: Reload or White Flag?	Personal	Lamestream LSM (Lamestream media) Reload White Flag	258 users reiterated this language

Table 2

Character Attacks

The first and most effective thematic element of Palin's language is the use of character attacks, or name-calling. The use of naming and name-calling is a mechanism for exhibiting power over a person, event or object. The act of naming a person or place demonstrates the creation of a new power relation between the namer and the named. In James Valentine's text *Naming the Other: Power Politeness and the Inflation of Euphemisms* he discusses how naming can both create recognition for an individual, as well as the negative impact of imposing a name on another person:

> A name may be a prerequisite not only for social position but also for social action and political solidarity. Bourdieu notes the power of names to impose recognition of one's identity upon others. Equally significant is the power to impose others' identity upon them, as well as the power to deny names for oneself or others. (Valentine)

In this quote Valentine discusses the significance of naming for identity creation. The most successful metaphors used by Sarah Palin in her social media discourse use naming as a way of ascribing a negative identity to her political opponent, Barak Obama.

Some of Palin's most impactful messages in terms of user uptake use metaphor as a way of ascribing negative identity to a group or person she opposes. When looking at the most successful metaphors coded for this research, there is an obvious affinity to character attack language as the type of metaphor that is most readily reiterated in user comments. Out of the 1805 instances of user uptake in the 10 documents coded, 1294 of them were up taking the language of a specific character attack against President Barak

Obama. 72% of commenters who used Palin's language, chose to reuse metaphors that portrayed Obama in a negative way.

In a note created on July 9th 2011 Palin uses the metaphor "Sugar Daddy has run out of sugar" in reference to President Barak Obama. The metaphor compares the president of the United States to being financially dependant on a partner. This metaphor is a direct character attack on Barak Obama, as it paints an unflattering picture of the president as someone who is financially incompetent The note goes back and forth from discussing Obama as a sugar daddy, to discussing Obama as a beggar taking "sugar" from hard working taxpayers. Palin's metaphor does not show logical progression from the title "The Sugar Daddy Has Run Out of Sugar; Now We Need New Leaders" to the idea that the American tax-payers are the "sugar daddy". Sarah Palin's supporters reiterated the term "Sugar Daddy" on 97 occasions, showing the strong language uptake of this character attack. (See Table 2)

A second example of Sarah Palin's supporters readily reiterating character attack language is demonstrated through her Facebook Note article "Lame Duck President". In this Note, Palin uses the hunting metaphor of a "lame duck" to describe President Obama's 2011 decisions regarding the raising of the American debt ceiling. The metaphor "Lame Duck" was reiterated by Palin's supporters 125 times in supporter comments. (See Table 2)

Palin's supporters readily uptake language that directly attacks the character and performance of her political opponent Barak Obama. In this quote from James Valentine's text *Naming the Other: Power Politeness and the Inflation of Euphemisms* he

discusses how a name can create a conception of the character of a person, whether accurate or not:

> Here names encapsulate the other's identity in terms of key characteristics: the key unlocks the essence of being, summing up all that it is necessary to know. Such knowledge is of course linked to power. (Valentine)

The topics of the articles written by Palin attacking Obama's character ranged in subject matter from policy issues, to economics, to value judgments. The character attack metaphors that supported and highlighted these arguments became language that was most often reused by Palin's supporters in their comments. Sarah Palin uses character attacks in the form of metaphors to provide her audience with a simplistic idea of who a character, most often Barak Obama, is. Character Attack language is the language most often used in the language "uptake" of Sarah Palin's supporters. (See Table 2)

Simplistic Language

The second theme common of successful metaphors used by Sarah Palin is the use of simplistic language to explain complex issues. Sarah Palin uses metaphor in her articles on policy to explain complex American policy issues, in a format accessible to her supporter population. Simplified language through the use of metaphor can assist readers in comprehending subject matter they were previously unfamiliar with. Simplifying complex political issues can have negative results as well. Language that is too simple can often leave out necessary details that would aid readers in developing a

complete understanding of an issue or event. Sarah Palin effectively "dumbs down" complex American issues such as the raising of the debt ceiling in 2011 by using metaphor to appeal to the largest audience possible. Woods explains how the use of simplistic or euphemized language can distort the realities of the circumstances or event you are discussing:

> (…political discourse) uses phrasing of language in a way that presents unproven information as fact, and the insidious use of metaphor and euphemism to influence and color our perception of political events and actions (Woods 52).

In the quote Woods is explaining that the way a politician chooses to use language can change the reader's perception or experience of the events being discussed. Palin's deliberate use of simple language and metaphor to describe complex events changes the way in which the readers perceived the reality of those events. A good example of Palin using simple language and metaphor to explain complex issues is her commentary on the issue of American debt and the debate around raising the debt ceiling in the United States. The article is titled "Lame Duck President" and has metaphor riddled throughout in an effort to simplify the issue of American debt into a 300 word Facebook Note:

> This is the same president who ignored his own debt commission's recommendations and demonized the voices of fiscal sanity who proposed responsible plans to reform our entitlement programs and rein in our dangerous debt trajectory (Palin 2011).

In this quote Palin is using a religious metaphor to describe Obama's decisions regarding the 2011 American debt crisis, however, this quote does not effectively explain or

describe the American crisis. Sarah Palin's language uses metaphor and imagery in order to simplify a complex issue into a black-and-white case of Obama making detrimental financial decisions, and "demonizing the voices of fiscal sanity".

The "Lame Duck" metaphor was reiterated by Palin's supporter base 125 times, showing a significant uptake of that language. The term "lame duck" is a hunting metaphor that gives the audience the image of an incapable, immobile president. This is a very simple metaphor used to describe a very complex issue of economic decline that could not possibly be explained in Facebook Note article content. When looking at Frequency of Uptake as a marker of success, the use of simple language is consistent in all of Sarah Palin's most effective metaphors. Her use of metaphor to explain complex issues in an accessible format for her supporters is an effective discursive practice.

Populist Language

The third mechanism used in Sarah Palin's successful online rhetoric is the discursive practice of using Populist language. Fairclough's work on Margaret Thatcher, discussed in the Literature Review section of this paper, he argues that Thatcher uses rhetoric strategically to extol the language of the everyday citizen, thus identifying herself with the working class (Fairclough 147). Fairclough asserts that using populist language is an effective mechanism to leverage the support of a less educated population of voters (Fairclough 147). Like Thatcher, Palin also uses populist language in her rhetoric. Populist language aligns Sarah Palin with the American working class population, and enhance the perception that she "relates" to her supporters. Palin

reinforces her populist identity by using slang terms in her rhetoric, such as the term "boondoggle", and keeping her discourse short and simple. Sarah Palin also creates her own language, using made up terms such as Lamestream and using acronyms such as WTF.

Two of Sarah Palin's Facebook Notes most effectively demonstrate the success of her populist rhetoric. The first uses the made up term "Lamestream" in discussion about the mainstream media in America. The second reverts Obama's campaign slogan WTF (Winning The Future) and uses this acronym to represent a message contrary to Barak Obama's intended use. Both articles use populist language to engage a broad spectrum of people from various educational backgrounds.

The first article that demonstrates Sarah Palin's use of populist language is a note titled *Lamestream Media: Reload or White Flag* published on March 24th 2011. In this note content Sarah Palin describes American liberal media as "Lamestream media". The term "lamestream" attracted a lot of attention in the comment section of this Note, as many of her supporters readily reused this term in their comments. References to the lamestream media were reiterated 258 times by Palin's commenters. (See Figure 1)

The second article that uses populist language effectively to leverage support is an article titled *Another "WTF" Obama Foreign Policy Moment**. The asterisks refer to Palin's use of the acronym WTF, as this is Barak Obama's campaign slogan standing for "Winning The Future". Sarah Palin uses the acronym WTF in a manner that subverts the meaning Barak Obama has ascribed to it, in favor of original slang use of this term. This article was coded of frequency of the uptake of the term WTF. On Sarah Palin's note

WTF Obama Foreign Policy Moment, 700 users reiterated the acronym "WTF" in their user comments. This article received the highest frequency of language uptake of all the research conducted for this study. In Fairclough's work on Thatcherism and populist language in Conservative politics, he discusses the idea that in order to for populist rhetoric to be effective, it must break down the "remote and authoritarian" relations typical of traditional political campaigning (Fairclough 147). By using the term WTF, Palin is absorbing the slang rhetoric of her supporter population and aligning herself with the "everyday" citizen, while distancing herself from the traditional norms of political discourse.

A high quantity of users chose to uptake Palin's populist language, indicating that the use of populist terms in campaign rhetoric is a successful discursive practice. Contrived terms and the use of slang reinforce Sarah Palin's populist nature, as they serve as anti-intellectual elements of her discourse. The anti-intellectual nature of her discourse is accessible to a wide audience, and therefore is an effective method in creating language that is reiterated by her supporters. The use of populist language is a consistent theme when assessing the most successful language used in Sarah Palin's Facebook discourse.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

This study assessed Sarah Palin's use of the social media tool Facebook, and looked specifically at how Palin constructs her message through a direct and informal digital platform. This study established some of the key mechanisms Palin uses to construct her discourse, through the process of identifying and assessing key linguistic devices used in Palin's messaging. Through careful coding of thousands of user comments on Palin's Facebook Note content, the Frequency of Uptake for each metaphor was determined, showing the number of users who chose to reiterate Palin's language directly back to her in their commentary. The uptake analysis showed the metaphors that Palin's audience identified with and engaged with most often. From this analysis, three themes that were common to the most successful metaphors were determined through the Frequency of Uptake coding process. Sarah Palin's most successful language employs Character Attacks or the use of Naming, Simplified Ideas, and Populist Discourse. These three thematic elements effectively encompass the nature of Sarah Palin's most successful language when using the social medium of Facebook Notes. Sarah Palin's language through the use of online media is an interesting and dynamic topic that deserves further research and analysis.

Social media and online networks open up a new space for democratic discussion and political action. By using this instant, open and accessible medium for political conversations, Politicians are moving toward new methods of campaign management. As these media are accessible from the comfort of a users home, as well as on smart phone devices, users can post both instantly and anonymously with ease of use. Political

campaign managers must be aware of the public and instant discourse a politician enters into when using social media platforms. Politicians expose themselves to a lot of risk by entering into these dialogues because of their public, live nature (Panagopoulous 262).

As Facebook is a relatively new platform for political discourse, further research is necessary to properly assess the impact this medium is having on the political atmosphere, and more importantly the impact it is having on the turnout of elections. As it was necessary to sharpen the scope of this research this study focused on the user uptake of language in the comments on Palin's discourse. There are at least four types of further studies that should be performed on the topic of the use social media as a political platform. The first study that should be proposed to build off of the present research is one that focuses on the precautions politicians are currently taking to control the negative attention they receive through social media outlets. Through interaction with user comments on Sarah Palin's Facebook Note content, it became apparent that Palin was harnessing the power of peer pressure to have her supporters self monitor the comments on her Facebook site. She used her position and celebrity to ensure her supporters immediately quelled any statements from users presenting an oppositional ideology, by requesting outright for her supporters to point out any opposition. As this study did not deal directly with the negative commentary received by politicians on a social media site, it was beyond it is scope to delve further into the social phenomenon of supporter-regulated commentary. A further study should monitor negative commentary on a politician's social media platform, and assess any call to action by the politician to regulate this oppositional commentary. The complementary study could also monitor the responses of the supporters to this negative commentary. This study could demonstrate

the most effective ways a politician can control their social media presence, and cope with the negative backlash that can occur on a live public medium.

A second opportunity for further research lies in the actual language of the commentor's support. As this study is focused on coding user uptake of Palin's predominant metaphor, it was not feasible to assess the content of in all of the thousands of user comments on Palin's Notes. Conducting a discourse analysis on these comments would provide a rich opportunity for further research into how social media is used by citizens to engage in the democratic process. During the data coding practice it became apparent that the language used by the Palin's supporters had some easily identifiable trends, including the constant discussion of race, the push for Sarah Palin to run in the 2012 election, and sometimes very strong political statements. Further research into how this medium is used by the "Tea Party" and Sarah Palin supporters would yield an interesting and telling window in to the minds of this specific segment of American society.

The third study that could build off of the study of Sarah Palin's supporter comments would be a comparative research between the ways in which Democratic and Republican politicians utilize Facebook to communicate with their supporters and promote their political brand. Sarah Palin uses discourse in a very deliberate way to position herself as a populist rogue candidate. A third study should analyze the differences and similarities between the discourse of the Tea Party and the Democratic party through the new campaign platform of Facebook. This study should conduct a Form and Function analysis of the specific parts of speech used by each of the different parties. This study should focus specifically on how each party represents the policy issues they

discuss through coding the way in which each party structure their language (Gee 54). This study would build off of Fairclough's work on Thatcherism and the differences in speech by Democratic and Conservative politicians. This study would allow for a larger scope and a wider sample of content to be analyzed and assessed which would provide more accurate findings in assessing the validity of social media platforms in a political context. This study would continue the study of the digitization of political campaigns, timely research leading up to the 2012 American elections.

The fourth opportunity for further research into the discourse of Sarah Palin through the platform of social media should deal with election outcomes. This study should look at the effect support on social media outlets has on the outcome of an election. This study would need to conduct a large-scale analysis through the use of exit interviews and voter statistics to assess the impact "friending" a candidate on Facebook or showing support through comments actually have on election outcomes. This research would further the study of how supporter engagement on political party pages translates in real world political action. This study is necessary to determine the real-world impact user engagement in social media has as a platform for political campaigning.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Preliminary Coding of Sarah Palin's Note *Lamestream Media Reload or White Flag?*

Lamestream Media: Reload or White Flag?

by Sarah Palin on Thursday, March 24, 2011 at 10:36pm

"Let's keep pivoting around media bias, and not get distracted with the vulgar personal shots. Call out lies and set the record straight, but always keep the ball moving. No one ever won a game only playing defense."

Upon my return from an outstanding and productive trip to India and Israel, I've been inundated with requests to respond to petty comments made in the media the past few days, including one little fella's comment which decent people would find degrading. (I won't bother responding to it though, because it was made by he who reminds me of an annoying little mosquito found zipped up in your tent; he can't do any harm, but buzzes around annoyingly until it's time to give him the proverbial slap.)

I've given this a lot of thought, and I'd like to share my thoughts on the never-ending issue of media bias.

When it comes to responding to the media, the standard warning is: Don't pick a fight with people who buy ink by the barrel because calling out the media and holding them accountable is a risky endeavor. Too often the first instinct is to ignore blatant media bias, crudeness, and outright lies, and just hope the media instigator will grow up and provide fairer coverage if you bite your tongue and not challenge the false reporting of an openly hostile press. But I've never bought into that. That's waving the white flag. I just can't do it because I have too much respect for the importance of a free press as a cornerstone of our democracy, and I have great respect for the men and women in uniform who sacrifice so much to defend that First Amendment right. Media, with freedom comes responsibility.

Friends, too often conservatives or Republicans in general come across as having the fighting instinct of sheep. I don't. I was raised to believe that you don't retreat when you're on solid ground; so even though it often seems like I'm armed with just a few stones and a sling against a media giant, I'll use those small resources to do what I can to set the record straight. The truth is always worth fighting for. Doing so isn't whining or "playing the victim card"; it's defending the truth in fairness to those who seek accurate information. I'll keep attempting to correct misinformation and falsehoods about myself and my record, and I will certainly never shy from defending others who are unfairly attacked. This is in the name of justice.

But two decades in politics have taught me that when it comes to picking battles, often it's best to ignore the truly petty, ugly personal media shots because engaging in a counter argument with disreputable,

intolerant people doesn't vindicate me; it merely gives those people the attention they seek. It wastes my time and it distracts from what we should focus on.

We must always remember the big picture. The media has always been biased. Conservatives – and especially conservative women – have always been held to a different standard and attacked. This is nothing new. Lincoln was mocked and ridiculed. Reagan was called an amiable dunce, a dangerous warmonger, a rightwing fanatic, and the insult list goes on and on. (But somehow Reagan still managed to win two major electoral landslides, and this was in the days before the internet and talk radio when all he had were three biased network news channels spinning reports on him. If he could do so much with so little and still be such an optimistic and positive leader, then surely we can succeed with the new media tools at our disposal.)

Let's just acknowledge that commonsense conservatives must be stronger and work that much harder because of the obvious bias. And let's be encouraged with a sense of poetic justice by knowing that the "mainstream" media isn't mainstream anymore. That's why I call it "lamestream," and the LSM is becoming quite irrelevant, as it is no longer the sole gatekeeper of information.

Let's keep pivoting around media bias, and not get distracted with the vulgar personal shots. Even with limited time we can try to call out lies and set the record straight, but always keep the ball moving. No one ever won a game only playing defense.

I'll keep correcting false reporting, and I'll defend others to the hilt; but I won't spend any more precious, limited time responding to personal, vulgar, sexist venom spewed my way.

Today, our country is faced with seemingly overwhelming challenges. We have an unsustainable and immoral $14 trillion debt problem which, combined with a self-inflicted energy crisis, could bring America to her knees. The President of the United States is manipulating an energy supply by refusing to develop our U.S. energy resources. Shouldn't that be the media's focus today? Wouldn't you like more information on the deficit that for last month alone was the highest in our history at $223 billion? That single month's deficit was more than the entire deficit for the year 2007! We still have a 16% real unemployment rate. We had 2.9 million home foreclosures last year alone, with this year predicted to be even worse. Americans who are struggling to make ends meet are now hit by rising food and energy prices – exacerbated by the Fed's decision to drop that $600 billion money bomb known as QE2 on us. Gas has already hit $4 per gallon in some areas. And let's not forget that our men and women in uniform are deployed far from home today. From Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, to who-knows-where tomorrow under a clouded, confused Obama Doctrine, our armed forces are in harm's way, defending our interests and protecting our freedoms.

Now these are the real concerns to Americans. These are times when real leadership is needed. We must never be distracted from these real concerns.

Petty comments from the small-minded are used to distract. Stay focused, America. Don't wave any white flag. Simply put, let's spend our precious time on causes that are worthy.

- Sarah Palin

Appendix E: MPC MRP Author's Declaration Page

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this Major Research Paper.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this MRP to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Signature

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this MRP by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Signature