

Identity Appeals in Political Campaigns and Women's Voter Response in the Instagram Era

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the impact of political campaign appeals on voters' decisions using social media, also focusing on women's responses and the underlying causal mechanisms shaping these reactions. It also investigates whether both male and female candidates can leverage identity-based messages with comparable effectiveness. This study focuses on analyzing the rhetorical strategies that specifically reference women and women-specific issues used by politicians in the 2024 presidential campaigns on their Instagram accounts over a 4-week period. Additionally, I created a survey consisting of 15 questions, including multiple-choice and free-response items, to gauge how these rhetorical strategies affect young women's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about presidential candidates. The research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of these strategies on young women voters in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and to explore potential differences in rhetorical approaches between Democrat and Republican candidates, as well as between male and female candidates. Questions also explore the current thoughts and opinions of college-aged women regarding candidates' Instagram content and how these strategies influence their views about candidates from a Midwestern university.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple decades, the political campaign landscape has changed drastically. Historically, for a presidential candidate, reaching the public was done by public speaking, appearing on TV, or in newspapers. Today, it is common for candidates attempting to reach potential voters through spaces such as Twitter, Reddit, Facebook, Instagram, or other forms of social media. With this relatively new form of communication emerging, it is necessary to examine the ways in which politicians target women using rhetorical appeals, and in turn, the messages being received by this group.

Nearly all political campaigns use identity appeals targeted at various voter groups, one of these being women. To assess the impact of these campaign appeals on voters' decisions, it is crucial to examine women's responses, decipher the underlying causal mechanisms shaping these reactions, and determine if both male and female candidates can deliver messages with comparable effectiveness.

In my research, I will be examining the rhetorical strategies which specifically reference women and/or women specific issues used by politicians in the 2024 presidential campaigns on their Instagram accounts over a 4-week period. In addition to this, I have created a survey consisting of 15 questions, both multiple choice and free responses which gauges how rhetorical strategies used by presidential candidates on Instagram affects young women's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about a given candidate. I hope to gain a greater understanding of what impact these strategies have had on young women voters in La Crosse, Wisconsin and whether this rhetorical method shapes their ideas, thoughts, and feelings on presidential candidates.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Politicians and other public figures often take advantage of digital tools to tackle societal issues. Consequently, scholars focus on how these actors participate in interconnected social writing platforms to accomplish their objectives. Studying these interactions becomes increasingly important, given the impact of writing, technology, and social networks on shaping and transforming broader societal discourse. The evolving dynamics of this transformation are particularly noteworthy as social media and other networked writing platforms become crucial components of activists' initiatives.

Barack Obama was nicknamed the first “social media president” for his strategic use of social media technologies in his 2008 campaign (Walls & Vie 2017). The 2016 presidential election placed as a key player in the ability of a political candidate to garner votes. Nevertheless, the 2016 presidential election highlighted the significance of social media in contemporary political campaigns, demonstrating that candidates can leverage platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, Facebook, and other social media technologies. This ability has the potential to disrupt conventional methods of comprehending political campaigning. Former president Donald Trump further intensified his use of social media platforms leading up to his inauguration, employing unprecedented tactics such as criticizing the press, showcasing his accomplishments, and expressing grievances.

It is established that social media platforms have become a crucial aspect to campaigns and elections in the past decade. Further, differences can be seen in how women candidates use their platform compared to their male competitors. A study conducted in 2015 in Israel examines the ability of men and women politicians and their comparative ability to garner support on social media. The study measured users' participation and engagement in politicians' posts on Facebook during eight days of the 2015 Israeli election campaign in order to investigate the disparities in the amount of social media engagement that male and female politicians generate. The results of the study demonstrate that social media offers a positive environment for female politicians. In terms of replies to their posts, female politicians generated an equal number of comments and participation as their male counterparts.

Surpassing the hypothesis that social media offers a more level playing field for female politicians, the results show that female politicians actually garnered higher user interaction compared to their male counterparts (in terms of likes and shares). According to the data provided, social media gives female politicians a chance to engage their constituents and could even help them market themselves while running for office. The language employed and subjects covered by male and female politicians are the same. In terms of rhetorical techniques examined in the study, however, there were no considerable distinctions between male and female politicians' use of voice (ethos), fact-based arguments (logos), and emotive language (pathos) in rhetoric. Thus, the evidence points to the similarity between the rhetoric used by male and female politicians, with both employing an authoritative voice, facts, and emotions in their speeches.

This study is the closest to what I plan on replicating in my own research. I was inspired by the idea of measuring how effective messages from women candidates versus male candidates are on social media. I also find the timeframe in which this study was done to be interesting and useful. The analysis was done for 8 days leading up to an election, and while I cannot exactly replicate this due to time constraints, I am interested in conducting my research in “real time” several months prior to the 2024 presidential election.

Further, the ways in which women and male candidates aim to target certain groups can be widely varied and is shaped around a candidates' relationship with the group they are reaching. Identity-based targeting involves appealing to women through the emotional connection they share with their group, as outlined by Huddy (2002). This approach differs from issue-based targeting in that it incorporates symbolic appeals aimed at fostering a shared group identity or common interests. Unlike the focus of issue-based targeted messages, which revolves around agreement on specific issues, identity-based targeting seeks to establish a broader sense of unity or connection within the targeted group. In 2012 Michelle Obama spoke these words during one of President Barack Obama's campaign videos: “This November, there is so much on the line for all of us, but especially for women. Our votes will determine whether we will keep fighting for equal pay in the workplace, whether we keep supporting women small business owners, and whether women will be able to make our own decisions about our bodies and our healthcare”. Here she utilizes an identity-based approach. By calling attention to women-specific issues, she attempts to make an emotional connection to an under-represented group during a high-stakes election.

While there are similarities in how male and female politicians reach their intended audiences, it is important to also look at the distinctions between how messages are interpreted by the social media users themselves, and whether women's thoughts and feelings about a given candidate are shaped around the gender of said candidate. Marketing strategies for consumers, as discussed by Bailey (2004) and Issenberg (2012), involve tactics like reaching out to smaller voter segments with personalized messages. These messages, known as “dog whistles,” are designed to be heard only by specific groups, ensuring they remain unheard by others due to potentially unfavorable reactions (Hillygus and Shields 2008). This overall approach is termed targeting, denoting the delivery of candidate messages tailored to influence a specific group's favorable evaluation. To pinpoint these targeted voters, strategists rely on databases containing consumer information, party affiliations, and issue preferences. Subsequently, campaigns employ narrowcasting techniques, utilizing customized media channels such as direct mail, email, text messages, web pages, ads, phone calls, and personal canvassing (Hillygus and Shields 2008). In crafting these messages, campaigns assume that group members possess distinct values, issue priorities, or are susceptible to particular framings due to shared characteristics. The study consisted of employing an experimental design where the author manipulated the gender of the candidate (man vs. woman) and the message

from the candidate (identity-based targeting vs. issue-based targeting). The messages took the form of websites, and participants were randomly assigned one of four websites. After reviewing the website they were assigned, participants answered questions about their perceptions of the candidate, attitudes towards specific groups, and views on policies. The anticipated outcome was that the identity appeal would be more effective from an in-group member rather than an out-group member. By comparing how women respond to the identity-based appeal with their response to the issue appeal from either a female or a male candidate, it was found that women in the identity-based treatment condition express a higher likelihood of voting for the female candidate than the issue-based control condition. My research aims to explore similar patterns among college-aged women at a Midwestern university.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My questions include but are not limited to: How are the 2024 presidential campaigns using rhetoric to appeal to women on their Instagram accounts? Are there differences in the rhetorical strategies between Democrat and Republican candidates? Or between men and women candidates? What are the current thoughts and opinions of young college-aged women about the content that presidential candidates produce on Instagram? How do these rhetorical strategies used influence thoughts and feelings about candidates from college-aged women at a Midwestern university?

METHODS

I used a mixed-methods approach for my research, which includes both a survey and Instagram post analysis. A substantial part of my study involved conducting a 4-week analysis of 3 presidential candidates on Instagram. My analysis ran from February 19 through March 18, 2024. The candidates I chose for my analysis were Democratic incumbent Joe Biden, Republican candidate and former president Donald Trump, and Republican candidate Nikki Haley. I chose these candidates for several reasons. First, I wanted to analyze both Republican and Democrat candidates. I also wanted to gauge the differences (or lack thereof) in men versus women candidates. In doing this, I sought to answer my questions of: Are there differences in the rhetorical strategies between Democrat and Republican candidates, or between men and women candidates? In my analysis, I recorded all posts which referenced women or women-specific issues, as well as kept record of how many total posts each candidate's account produced. Following this, I coded the messages which included references to women or women-specific issues for negative, positive, and neutral language the candidate used to speak about the issue. The decision to run my analysis for four weeks was made for two reasons. One being the time constraints on the project, and the other being that with the high frequency of posts produced by each candidate per week, four weeks would still provide adequate data for analysis.

Another part of my research involved conducting a survey, consisting of 15 questions, including multiple choice and free response. Three of the questions are free responses, which involves respondents viewing an image and providing 3-5 words (or more) about their thoughts and feelings regarding the image shown. The images were chosen from the Instagram accounts of Nikki Haley and Joe Biden. Since Nikki Haley's account only consisted of positive images and messages regarding women and women-specific issues, I chose one positive image to insert into the survey. From Joe Biden's account, I chose one positive and one negative post. This was intended to gauge how respondent's reactions may or may not differ when presented with positive and uplifting messages and images compared to negative ones. Nikki Haley had solely positive posts during the four-week period, and the image provided in the survey was one chosen at random. Finally, since Donald Trump did not have any posts referencing women or women-specific issues over the four-week period, his account was not represented or referenced in the survey at all. I then coded the responses to the free response questions under the same criteria as the Instagram post analysis: negative, positive, and neutral language. I also looked for writing that indicated uncertainty or confusion.

I chose to conduct a survey because I expected this design to be beneficial due to the potentially personal information gathered, which I can anticipate participants would be more engaging with anonymous questioning. A study done by the BMC Medical Research Methodology found that "anonymous survey methods appear to promote greater disclosure of sensitive or stigmatizing information compared to non-anonymous methods". I understand that discussing politics is a stigmatizing topic in our culture, but I hope to gain as much insight as possible into what college-aged women think of political campaign rhetoric. The survey was distributed via snowball sampling as well as through professors in the political science department advertising the survey to their students. According to Oregon State University Division of Research and Innovation, snowball sampling is "a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in

identifying other potential subjects”. The sample group is said to grow like a “snowball”. The survey will be open for three weeks, from March 20 to April 10, 2024.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were required to meet the following criteria to be eligible for the survey: U.S. citizen, woman/woman-identified, and between 18 years and 26 years of age. This survey focuses specifically on young college-aged women at UWL and across the La Crosse area. All participants were encouraged to pass the survey on to 1-2 people they know and think would be interested in participating.

RESULTS

In conducting my research, I documented posts from each candidate over this 4-week period and gathered data from posts which include rhetoric about women or directly mentioning women-specific issues. Over this 4-week period, Nikki Haley posted a total of 108 posts on her Instagram account. Of these, 5 contained messages about women or women-specific issues (4.6%). Joe Biden had 76 total posts, in which 8 contained messages about women or women-specific issues (10.5%). While Donald Trump had 77 total posts in the 4-week period, 0 contained messages about women or women-specific issues. Among Nikki Haley’s posts, 5 contained only positive messages regarding women or women-specific issues (100%). Keywords include “strong”, “strong girls/women”, “thankful”, “empowerment”, “special” and “heart”. Joe Biden’s account produced 3 posts containing positive messages (37.5%), while 4 contained negative messages (50%), and 1 was both positive and negative (12.5%). Among these, keywords include “rip away”, “restore”, “advancing”, “improve”, “integrated” and “prioritized”. The graphs show the percentages of posts related to women-specific issues compared to the number of overall posts from each candidate, as well as whether those posts are positive, negative, or neutral.

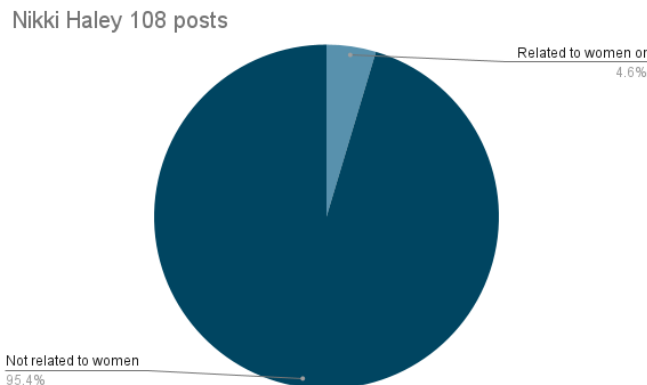


Figure 1. Graph of Nikki Haley’s total Instagram post breakdown.

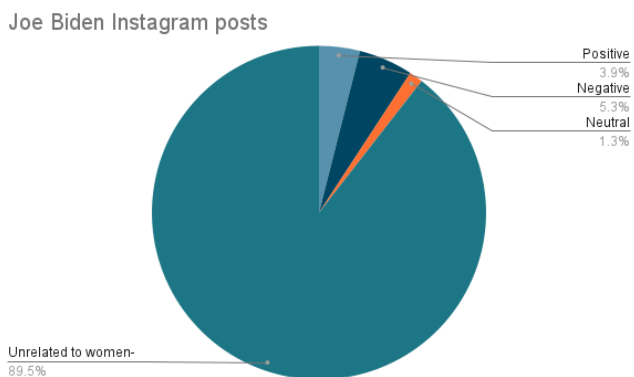


Figure 2. Graph of Joe Biden’s total Instagram post breakdown

Moving on to the results of the survey, the survey resulted in 32 responses. Overall, responses were widely varied, although some patterns were present in the data. When asked how respondents gain information about a presidential candidate, 84% of respondents chose either “Twitter/Instagram/Facebook” or “Through family members or friends”. 71.9% considered social media to be an informative news source for current events and politics, while 18.8% considered it to be an unreliable source, and 9.4% were unsure. An overwhelming majority of respondents have an Instagram account that they have used in the past month (93%), and only 2 respondents do not currently have an Instagram account (6.3%). When asked if respondents follow any current presidential candidates of the upcoming 2024 election on Instagram, 87.5% answered no and 12.5% answered yes.

The next question asked how much time respondents spend on social media per week, and the responses were widely varied. The majority (34.4%) selected 2-4 hours. Slightly less (21.9%) selected 1-2 hours, 18.8% selected 30-60 minutes, 15.6% chose less than 30 minutes, and 9.4% spent more than 4 hours weekly on Instagram. When asked, “how frequently do you engage with posts from presidential candidates through any of the following: likes, shares, comments and reposts?”, 75% selected “I do not engage with posts from candidates”. This leaves a total of 8 respondents who interact with posts from candidates to some extent. 4 of them engage monthly (12.5%), 3 engage weekly (9.4%), and 1 respondent engages with such posts daily (3.1%). The following question asked, “what form(s) of media on Instagram do you find most engaging?”. Respondents could select any that apply to them. 61.3% selected “videos”, 54.8% selected “photos”, and 38.7% selected “only text (photos of a tweet, slogans, quotes)”. When asked, “would you be more likely to support a candidate who posted on social media about issues specific to women?” 84% of respondents answered that they would be more likely to do so to some extent. The results of this question are broken down in the table below.

“Would you be more likely to vote for a candidate who posts about issues specific to women?”

15	Much more likely
12	Slightly more likely
4	No difference
0	Less likely

Table 1. Results of survey question, “*Would you be more likely to vote for a candidate who posts about issues specific to women?*”.

It is clear that the data points to a majority opinion that participants are more likely to some extent to vote for a candidate who posts about such issues.

Responses to Joe Biden’s Instagram Post 1

The following section of the survey consisted of viewing an image chosen from a given candidate’s Instagram account which was posted within the 4-week data collection period, and then participants were asked, “What feelings or emotions do you associate with the above image and the caption? Provide at least 3-5 words”. The first image (see appendix) shown was a positive image posted by Joe Biden, referencing the celebration of Women’s History Month. The responses were widely varied. Below is a table with keywords written by women in their responses, with the number on the left representing how many women wrote one of the following words in their response.

8	Inclusivity, Unified, Represented, Equality
7	Power, Empowerment, Female Empowerment
4	Proud
3	Joy, Happy, Pleased
3	Diversity
3	Supportive
3	Positive, Optimistic

Table 2. Organization of key words found in free response results for the presented image from Joe Biden’s account (see appendix image 1).

Outside of these patterns, there were many other answers that occurred individually. Some of these include other positive-coded words, such as “acknowledged”, “comfort”, “value” “freedom”, “growth” “love”, “faithful”, “impressed”, “friendly” and “beautiful”. 2 respondents wrote “appreciate”, and 2 wrote “inspired”.

Apart from respondents who only wrote words and phrases with positive connotations, many women had negative and neutral responses. Out of the dataset, 3 women answered that they felt the image was either “posed” or “staged”. Other negative coded responses to the image include: “political gain” “weird”, “phony” “indifferent”, “pushy”, and “fake”. In total, 13 responses (40%) included words or phrases with negative connotations. However, this does not mean that these 13 responses exclusively contained negative words. Only 3 responses in the dataset were exclusively negative. Other neutral coded answers include “interested”, “curious” or “confused” “political gain” “weird”. This dataset was unique in that many of the keywords represented in the responses expressed feelings of confusion, uncertainty, and skepticism, far more than in each of the other datasets, and many of these responses far exceeded the minimum word requirement (3-5 words). Below are responses that support this observation.

Respondent 17: *“Not sure if he is just trying to win votes or something that he is serious about pursuing”*.

Respondent 27: *“This image gives a sense of acknowledgment towards women and the accomplishments that we’ve achieved. However, it looks like a typical ad and it’s hard to believe that it’s not staged. So in all, there is a feeling of acknowledgement, but also deceitfulness”*.

Respondent 29: *“I think it’s great that he’s posting about it but not doing anything about it”*.

Respondent 30: *“It feels both inclusive and patronizing. A show of support when there are ten times as many men employed on capitol hill. Like when they take all of the women, black, and brown folks that work on a company and use those five people to advertise the diversity and inclusivity they supposedly have”*.

This evidence supports my overall observation that respondents feel skeptical or even ambivalent towards the image and message. This could contribute in part to why the responses for this question tend to be lengthier when compared to the other questions.

Responses to Nikki Haley’s Instagram Post

The second free response question contains an image from Nikki Haley’s Instagram account (see appendix) which is a positively coded message. While responses were more widely varied than for the first image, there were some patterns. Below is a table with keywords written by women in their responses, with the number on the left representing how many women wrote one of the following words in their response.

10	Cute, Sweet, Wholesome
5	Happy, Joy, Fun, Exciting
3	Childish

Table 3. Organization of key words found in free response results for the presented image from Nikki Haley’s account (see appendix image 2).

While the majority of responses were positive overall, 4 responses to this post (12.5%) were solely negatively coded. Examples of this include the response “sad representation”, and describing the message as “performative, self-centering, political”. However, many women felt conflicted about the image and expressed many ambivalent thoughts and feelings. Some responses are included below which support this observation.

Respondent 5: *“Personal, sincere--except for the shameless campaign promo”*

Respondent 10: *“Seen yet childish”*.

Respondent 26: *“Heartfelt and emotionally appealing, but it obviously takes advantage of young girls to propel their political position”*.

Given these examples, it is clear that many responses to this question present conflicting themes. This was something I had not anticipated prior to the conclusion of the survey.

Responses to Joe Biden’s Instagram Post 2

The third and final free response question of the survey was one from the Instagram account of Joe Biden, referencing the Alabama Supreme Court ruling on abortion and IVF treatments. It contains negative messaging relating to a women-specific issue. Out of the 32 responses, 100% of women had negative reactions to the image. This isn't to say the reactions were negative towards the candidate himself (although many were), but rather some were upset about the topic being discussed. The table below shows patterns found in the responses.

9	Rage, Anger, Upset
7	Sadness, Sad
6	Slightly Skeptical, Unsure, Questionable
5	Fear, Anxiety
4	Hopeful, Reassured, Appreciated

Table 4. Organization of key words found in free response results for the presented image from Joe Biden’s account (see appendix image 3).

In addition to these, 3 women related the post to blaming the issue on someone else. For example, Respondent 10 wrote: *“It seems everyone tries to blame everything on Trump just because they don’t like him. Biden could have said he won’t stop until we restore the protections without involving Trump’s name”*. This free response question had the highest number of responses out of the 3 survey questions with images which contained a respondent’s writing about being conflicted or unsure about their thoughts and feelings. Further examples of this are seen in the responses shown below.

Respondent 1: *“Confused, false, questionable”*.

Respondent 12: *“Again, not sure if this is just part of his campaign plan being democratic or if he truly cares about women’s rights.”*

Respondent 28: *“pleased, glad yet unsure, intrigued.”*

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research shed light on the importance of considering women's reactions to presidential candidates' Instagram posts and the broader implications for political engagement, representation, and gender equality. This discussion section will get into key insights from the study and highlight their implications for both electoral politics and social media discourse. Reflecting on my first question, “how are the 2024 presidential campaigns using rhetoric to appeal to women on their Instagram accounts?”, through my findings it is clear that this answer varies based on the candidate. Looking at the data, no candidate posted a high percentage of content about women-specific issues. In fact, Donald Trump posted nothing related to this in the 4-week period. Despite no candidate shaping their campaign around winning over the women’s vote, they all produced different results in how they posted about women’s issues, with both their gender status and political affiliation being factors.

Because there is not sufficient data to draw a firm conclusion, it cannot be determined whether the differences between the rhetorical approaches used by the Democratic candidate (Joe Biden) and the Republican candidate (Nikki Haley), were caused by their political affiliation or gender status. It is certain, though, that these differences do exist. Joe Biden leaned into traditionally democratic values, such as the right to have an abortion, to appeal to women on his Instagram platform. While we did not see this same strategy used by Nikki Haley, she did emphasize love and support for women and young girls, which can be seen as an appeal being made using her status as a woman.

The survey results offer valuable insights into the role of social media in shaping political engagement and attitudes, particularly among women. The high proportion of respondents who rely on platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook for information about presidential candidates highlights the increasing influence of social media in political communication today. Additionally, the majority of respondents view social media as an informative source for current events and politics, which gives credit to its significance as a platform for political information dissemination. Despite the prevalence of social media usage among respondents, the findings also reveal a notable lack of engagement with presidential candidates' posts on Instagram. A large majority of respondents do not follow any current presidential candidates for the upcoming 2024 election on Instagram, and only a small fraction engage with candidates' posts through likes, shares, comments, or reposts. This suggests a gap between passive consumption of political content on social media and active engagement with political candidates and their messages. Further, respondents' preferences for certain types of media on Instagram indicate a preference for visually engaging content, such as videos and photos. This result highlights the importance of multimedia content in capturing users' attention on Instagram.

Perhaps most notably, the survey results show strong support for candidates who address issues specific to women on social media. The overwhelming majority of respondents express a likelihood to support a candidate who posts about women's issues to some extent, with varying degrees of impact. This finding is evidence of the importance of gender-sensitive political communication and suggests that candidates who prioritize women's issues in their social media messaging may garner greater support among female voters.

While social media platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for political communication and engagement, there remains a need for further research to explore the efficacy of social media strategies in mobilizing voters, particularly women, and shaping electoral outcomes. Future studies could investigate the potential impact of gender-specific messaging on political attitudes and behavior, both online and offline. Overall, these results align with existing research highlighting the significance of gender in shaping political attitudes and behaviors. As I covered in my literature review, scholars have emphasized the importance of recognizing women as a heterogeneous group with varied interests, identities, and political leanings. Women's responses to candidates' social media posts reflect this diversity and underscore the need for nuanced approaches to gender-based political analysis and mobilization.

SIGNIFICANCE

This study has significance for journalists and people researching political rhetoric and voting patterns, and especially for those working on and studying campaigns in the La Crosse area. Research in this area can help understand what the public knows and thinks about current politics, how people self-identify in relation to a given issue, and how people might relate to the issue itself. Studying the thoughts and feelings about women specifically can be very beneficial. In every U.S. presidential election since 1980, the voter turnout among women has been higher than men, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Given this, understanding women's reactions to what presidential candidates are posting on Instagram is crucial since women constitute a significant portion of the electorate in the United States, and their opinions and perspectives shape political discourse and influence electoral outcomes. Additionally, every candidate of the 2024 presidential election uses Instagram frequently. Disregarding women's responses to candidates' social media content undermines the democratic process and overlooks an essential demographic.

Secondly, social media platforms such as Instagram play an increasingly present role in political communication and campaigning. Candidates use these platforms to shape their public image, convey their policy positions, and engage with voters directly. Therefore, women's responses to candidates' Instagram posts offer valuable insights into how effective their messaging is among this demographic. Thirdly, women's issues are integral to the broader political agenda, encompassing areas such as healthcare, reproductive rights, economic equity, and gender equality. By examining women's reactions to candidates' posts on Instagram, policymakers and political strategists can gauge the relevance of these issues among female voters and readjust their campaigns accordingly. Overall, social media serves as a platform for amplifying marginalized voices and challenging

dominant narratives. Women's perspectives on candidates' Instagram content provide a lens through which we should assess the inclusivity, authenticity, and responsiveness of political discourse about gender-related issues.

CONCLUSION

This research first analyzed Instagram posts by Nikki Haley, Joe Biden, and Donald Trump over a 4-week period, focusing on content related to women or women-specific issues. Haley's account featured 5 posts on these topics, all with positive messages, while Biden had 8 posts, with a mix of positive, negative, and neutral messages. Trump had no such posts during the period. The second method of my research involved a 15-question survey sent out to college-aged women in the La Crosse area. Survey responses indicated that most respondents use social media as a source of information about presidential candidates and consider it generally informative and reputable for current events and politics. While the majority have Instagram accounts, few follow presidential candidates. Most spend 2-4 hours weekly on social media, but few engage with posts from candidates. Videos were found to be the most engaging form of media on Instagram, followed by photos and text. Additionally, the vast majority of respondents stated they would be more likely to support a candidate who addresses issues specific to women on social media, with varying degrees of impact. Overall, the data suggests a general inclination towards supporting candidates who engage with women's issues on social media.

The survey also used free response questions to a set of images, which investigated respondents' emotional responses to Instagram posts by Joe Biden and Nikki Haley. For Biden's post celebrating Women's History Month, responses were diverse, with some expressing positive feelings like inclusivity and empowerment, while others felt skeptical or ambivalent- questioning the authenticity of the message. Similarly, Haley's post resulted in mixed reactions, with some finding it cute or sweet, while others criticized it as performative or politically motivated. Biden's post on the Alabama Supreme Court ruling on abortion and IVF treatments garnered overwhelmingly negative reactions, with many expressing anger or sadness, while some felt hopeful yet conflicted about the issue. These findings highlight the complexity of emotional responses to political content on social media, with sentiments ranging from positivity to skepticism and conflict.

LIMITATIONS

Of course, there were limitations in my study which might have accounted for the results gathered. A 4-week analysis of a candidates' social media account may not always be sufficient in obtaining extensive results. This is especially true in the case of candidate Donald Trump, who did not post about women or women-specific issues at all in the 4-week period. Further, having more time to run my data collection could have resulted in more conclusive data for the other two candidates as well. Along with this, I had 32 participants for my survey, and my goal number was 50. I estimate that the survey was distributed to around 80 people, meaning I received a 40% participation rate. This generally is not a bad rate, as the average survey participation rate is typically lower. However, had I received a higher rate of participation, I would have had more results to better inform my conclusions. Despite these limitations, sufficient evidence was still present to draw conclusions from.

On a final note, paying attention to women's responses relating to what presidential candidates are posting on Instagram is not just a matter of political strategy; it is a matter of democratic principle. It acknowledges the significance of women as voters, the power of social media in shaping political discourse, the relevance of women's issues in the political agenda, and the importance of supporting gender-inclusive politics.

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APPENDIX



113,883 likes

joebiden Women's History Month is a time for celebrating extraordinary women who have strengthened our nation.

This month, we celebrate the legacy of sung and unsung trailblazers, and advocates who have made the world a fairer, more just, and free place.

Image 1



nikkihaley



8,197 likes

nikkihaley This is a sample of the many friendship bracelets given to me by strong girls along the way. I am thankful for every single one. You are my mojo



#StrongGirlsBecomeStrongWomen

Image 2



joebiden and bidenharrishq



Joe Biden ✓
@JoeBiden

Make no mistake: this is a direct result of Donald Trump ending Roe v. Wade.

The Vice President and I won't stop until we restore the protections of Roe v. Wade in federal law for all women in every state.



Biden-Harris HQ @BidenHQ · 21h

CNN: Breaking news, the University of Alabama at Birmingham has paused IVF treatments after Alabama's GOP Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos are children. Patients and doctors could potentially be prosecuted criminally



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joebiden Make no mistake: this is a direct result of Donald Trump ending Roe v. Wade.

February 22

Image 3