

Abstract

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Entering Entertainment: Being a Politician on a Late-Night Talk Show

Increasingly, we find the political moving into various entertainment spaces. One such space where politicians can advance their campaign is the late-night talk show. During the 2016 American presidential elections, candidates Clinton and Trump visited such entertainment shows. Interested in the effect of such shows on the portrayal of politics, I ask how politicians discursively portray their identity as a presidential candidate in these entertainment programs. Employing Cultural Discourse Analysis, grounded in ethnography of communication, I identify which kinds of being, relating, acting, feeling and dwelling are, according to the candidates themselves, part of the identity of a politician within the American context. Namely, a set of cultural assumptions and values is taken by participants as common-sense in a given context and therefore implicitly present throughout the communication. The cultural beliefs implied by both candidates on these shows are: the need to have the qualities and temperament to be president, to care about the American people, to improve the lives of the American people, and to act in the best interest of the American people. Thus, the findings suggest that the discursive portrayal of politics produced on such talk shows has not been influenced (yet) by the space of entertainment, as they do not assert that politicians need to have entertaining qualities. Consequently, as these shows aim at entertaining the audience, politicians frequently commit pragmatic inconsistencies as they are required to contribute to this goal as well.