Final Report: Communication Practices, Diversity and Inclusion 2024/25

Group Name: Kamala Girls

Title of Project: A Platform Comparison: Visualizing Vice President Kamala Harris's 2024 Debate Coverage on Social Media vs. Traditional Media

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Abstract

This project explores the portrayal of Vice President Kamala Harris's performance during the 2024 U.S. presidential debate across both social media and traditional media platforms. By personifying Instagram and TikTok as social media platforms, and Fox News and CNN as traditional media outlets, the project visually highlights the differences in tone, messaging, and framing between these mediums. Furthermore, to complement the platform-specific analyses, the project also includes a 'representative' from Kamala Harris's campaign team to compare how information differs when conveyed by a primary source, rather than mediated by an outlet. Through this personification, the video aims to uncover how gendered portrayals influence the coverage of Harris, revealing contrasting styles in each platform's reporting. With the assistance of *Sona*, an "AI monitoring tool" inspired by the GMMP framework, the project contrasts the informal, personal, and often meme-driven language of social media with the more formal and structured tone of traditional media. Designed for an audience of students ages 18-26, the video illustrates how the platforms they engage with are shaped by gender and political biases, especially in politically charged events like the 2024 presidential debate.

Outline

Main Topic: The focus of our project is a comparative analysis of how Kamala Harris was represented as a presidential candidate in the 2024 U.S. election across traditional and social media platforms. Specifically, we examined how the language, tone, and framing used in these mediums either challenge or reinforce gendered narratives.

Relevance: Our topic is relevant in today's media driven political environment, where traditional media and social media play distinct yet complementary roles. Social media platforms like

Instagram and TikTok offer female politicians a direct way to connect with voters while traditional media platforms like CNN and Fox News often reflect societal gender biases in their coverage. Female politicians frequently face biased portrayals that emphasize gender stereotypes, which can shape public perception and influence their political success. By examining these dynamics, we aim to understand how different media platforms influence public perception, particularly with respect to gendered portrayals of women in politics.The significance of our analysis lies in shedding light on how these media platforms contribute to the public's understanding of women in politics. While traditional media has long been a powerful tool for shaping narratives, the rise of social media offers a more personal and accessible medium, allowing female politicians to present themselves more directly to the public.

Evidence and Existing Initiatives: This project is based on previous research that has examined the role of social media in advancing women in politics. A notable initiative was the 2021 study, "Social Media: Advancing Women in Politics?" conducted by the Women in Parliaments Global Forum (WIP), Harvard University's Shorenstein Center, and Facebook. This study explored how social media has become a significant tool for female politicians, allowing them to bypass traditional barriers in politics. It found that while traditional media continues to reflect societal gender biases, social media provides a space for women to connect with voters directly, build their personal brands and amplify their voices on important issues without being filtered by mainstream outlets.

Additionally, studies like the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) provided the theoretical and methodological foundation for analyzing gendered representation in media. This research informs the analysis of Kamala Harris's media portrayal, emphasizing how both social and traditional media narratives may either reinforce or challenge these gendered representations.

Goal and Target

Goal: Our goal is to identify and analyze the differences in language, tone, and framing used by social media platforms versus traditional media outlets in their portrayal of Kamala Harris 2024 debate coverage. This includes examining the frequency of gendered language, stereotypes, and themes of authenticity, competence, and relatability, which are frequently found in the representation of female politicians. The goal is to understand how media type influences public perceptions of female political figures and to assess whether social media offers a counter-narrative to traditional media portrayals.

Target: Our main target audience includes consumers of media, specifically the American electorate, to be made aware of how the portrayal of Kamala Harris varies widely amongst different media sources, namely social media and traditional media platforms. We hope to expand media literacy, especially when it comes to consequential elections and the impacts gender biases may have on a consumer of media.

Methodology

This study adopted a multi-platform approach to explore the portrayal of Vice President Kamala Harris during the 2024 U.S. presidential debate. The analysis spanned traditional media outlets (Fox News and CNN) and social media platforms (Instagram and X, formerly Twitter). Additionally, an AI monitoring tool, inspired by the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), was employed to systematically examine gendered representation across all platforms.

Fox News Analysis: To understand Fox News's framing of the debate, the team reviewed several video clips and articles discussing Kamala Harris's performance. Recurring themes, such as allegations of moderator bias against Donald Trump, were identified and incorporated into a script designed to emulate the network's characteristic broadcast style. This approach captured the emotionally charged language and direct messaging often used by Fox News to appeal to its audience.

CNN Analysis: The examination of CNN involved analyzing political commentary, roundtable discussions, and articles published on the network's YouTube channel and official website. By filtering content by date and genre, the team identified recurring narratives that emphasized Harris's strengths during the debate. The script for this section was crafted to reflect CNN's professional tone and was modeled on the presentation styles of their female political correspondents, incorporating elements such as language, demeanor, and appearance.

Instagram Analysis: For Instagram, the team created a dedicated account (@jus_tscrollingby) to observe how the platform's users discussed and framed the Harris-Trump debate. Hashtags such as #USDebate2024 and #KamalaVsTrump were used to locate relevant content. Efforts were made to interact with debate-related posts, follow key political accounts, and observe algorithmic shifts in the feed. However, the platform presented challenges, as the algorithm surfaced limited debate-specific content, often prioritizing unrelated or less substantive material.

X (Twitter) Analysis: On X (formerly Twitter), the team set up a new account and explored debate-related discussions using hashtags like #DebateNight2024 and #HarrisVsTrumpDebate. The analysis focused on posts by verified accounts, including politicians, journalists, and prominent bloggers, to understand the tone and framing of the discourse. The platform's polarized nature was evident, with users' personal biases shaping much of the content.

AI Monitoring Tool: To complement the platform-specific analyses, the team deployed "Sona," an AI monitoring tool inspired by the GMMP framework. This tool allowed for a structured evaluation of media content, focusing on five key dimensions: subject identification, language and tone, framing, stereotypes, and overall representation. Sona's name was inspired by "sonar," symbolizing its function as a sleek, modern system for detecting and analyzing patterns.

Kamala′s Campaign Representative Analysis: The team reviewed primary sources such as speeches delivered by campaign representatives, including one emphasizing Vice President Kamala Harris's commitment to reproductive rights and gender equality. The script was constructed to convey a clear and empowering message, highlighting Harris's vision to protect freedoms and champion women's health care decisions. Delivered in a professional yet approachable tone, the speech aimed to connect with voters by underscoring Harris's leadership and dedication to important issues.

Challenges and Limits

The analysis had several challenges. It mainly used mainstream media, missing useful perspectives from other sources. Simplifying the method added bias and reduced the analysis's depth. Relying on just four platforms didn't fully represent media coverage, making it hard to draw clear conclusions. Finding current and relevant content was difficult because many sources were outdated after the election, and campaign platforms were inactive, forcing reliance on other sources. Analyzing single texts made it hard to spot bigger patterns, and finding popular content on platforms like Instagram was tricky due to the time passed since the campaign. Limited resources also affected the creation of the accompanying video. Searching large media sites was often inefficient, as disorganized results mixed old and new articles, making it hard to find specific content from the past. Additionally, because the debate and election were recent, there wasn't much academic research on key topics like Kamala Harris's media portrayal, with most studies focusing on Donald Trump. This lack of research further limited the analysis.

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