

Themes, Ideology, and Social Media: A Critical Analysis of US Vice President Pence's Facebook Posts

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Abstract

Considering the paucity of literature on vice-presidential research, this exploratory study analyzes the Facebook discourse of former US Vice President Mike Pence, employing (Fairclough 2013) three-tier Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). We observed five salient themes: Criticism of Democrats, citizen appreciation, spousal support, border discourse, and religious affirmation. We argue that it recontextualizes the ideologies of “mediated Trumpism” and conservatism. In addition, we assert that his discourse on Facebook was more presidential than in his time as a Congressperson and Governor. Our findings indicate that his Facebook discourse demonstrates steadfast support for Donald Trump by openly touting his achievement and persona. His posts were congruent with some of Trump’s discourse in the media, which we attribute to the power relations between a President and his Vice. It also comports to the established functions of the Vice President, which is to support, complement or further enhance the president’s position. This study contributes to the literature on language and politics by extending an established theory to provide insights into how a rarely researched political actor engages in public diplomacy.

Keywords: Vice-presidential communication, social media, critical discourse analysis, themes, Mike Pence

Introduction

Vice Presidents are individuals who ascend to the second-highest office of the “land,” as they play an equally important role in electoral campaigns and governance. The crucial role of vice presidents in government cannot be underestimated, as they are the closest official or confidants to the president (Osei Fordjour, 2021). If anything happens to the president in office, such as impeachment or death, they take over the office, a phenomenon which has occurred eight times in

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the US (Nowak 2010). Particularly in the US, Vice Presidents are also known to the public. They play vital roles in Congress, like breaking tied votes and spearheading key governmental initiatives designated by the President, like leading diplomatic envoys. Lastly, their relevance, especially in the US, is manifested in staging vice-presidential debates, separate from presidential ones. Mainly in the US, a vice-presidential candidate needs to possess some distinct political qualities to complement the shortfalls of the presidential candidate (Sanders 2018).

Goldstein (2010) argues that in the history of US politics, Richard Bruce Cheney has been the most visible vice president who played a significant role in any political administration. The scholar further claims that his relevance was displayed by the critical positions President George W. Bush delegated him to handle, such as the spokesperson for the administration, party campaigner, and fund-raiser, which enhanced his role and reinvented the office of the vice president. In addition to this background, 14 Vice Presidents have risen to become Presidents in US history (U.S. Senate 2022), including current US President Joseph R. Biden. This opens essential critical academic inquiries on several areas of interest about occupiers of this position (their discourse, responsibilities, etc.).

Social media usage in political communication has become a critical asset to key global political actors. Since its inception, Facebook -which according to Statista.com, is the most-used social media platform, with over 2.9 billion users (as of February 2022) across the globe- has become an essential tool in many campaign managers' political strategies. Scholars have touted the 2008 US presidential elections as "the Facebook election" because Barack Obama utilized Facebook to his advantage, ultimately highlighting the relevance of the web 2.0 platform as an efficient channel for political campaigns (Johnson and Perlmutter 2009). Despite its functional and positive role, social media has also been touted by other researchers as a battleground for political contestation and a breeding ground for conflicts by politicians, as well as their supporters, who disapprove of each other's political perspectives, giving social media a dysfunctional usage (Brady et al. 2019). Politicians may openly launch scathing attacks on their opponents or embed sarcastic castigations in their text or language.

In addition, social media have reinvented public diplomacy as high-ranked government officials communicate policy and cultural relations and manage relationships with foreign stakeholders (Melissen 2007; Sevin and Ingenhoff 2018). Many researchers have systematically studied political discourses by political candidates, government officials, or their followers on social media, especially platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Fernandes et al. 2010; Osei Fordjour 2022).

Social media studies have generally focused on residents and presidential discourse, especially in places where the individual's personality affects their electoral fortunes, as well as on the discourse of lawmakers (Boulianne and Larsson 2021; Dastgeer and Onyebadi 2020). There is a lack of studies around vice-presidential discourse on social media, which creates an intellectual puzzle on how they communicate on the unique platform. At this crucial point in academia, where the political discourse of politicians provides contextual knowledge, we are at the crossroads in an era where we need to take a critical look at the discourse of an incumbent vice president. This will contribute to knowledge by providing insights into how the vice president of the US, a leading democracy in the world (Sikanku 2019), employs social media. It also contributes to the broader discourse on how politicians communicate on social media. This current study will analyze the language discourse on the official Facebook timeline of the then-US Vice President (Mike Pence) to expand the existing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) scholarship. Our goal is to answer two research questions: What were the salient themes in the Facebook posts of Vice President Mike Pence? And, what were the underlying ideologies in Mike Pence's Facebook posts?

Who is Mike Pence?

Michael Richard Pence, popularly referred to by the media as Mike Pence, is the 48th Vice President of the US, a former media freedom advocate and legal practitioner. Before he was nominated as running mate by President Donald Trump in the 2016 election, he served as the governor of Indiana from 2013 to 2017. He also served in the US House of Representatives from 2001 to 2013, after two failed bids (1988 and 1990), and was touted by many as one of the most experienced politicians in the US. In between his failed congressional requests, Pence served as head of a conservative think tank called Indiana Policy Review Foundation and assumed the talk

show host in 1992 of a show which aired on 18 radio stations. During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mike Pence was appointed by President Donald Trump to lead the COVID-19 task force.

As far as the media discourse is concerned, Mike Pence's political journey has assumed two different personas, which were positive earlier, but later moved in the opposite direction (Nesbitt 2018). Scholars had argued that before the election, Mike Pence was a first amendment advocate; however, he shifted to an anti-press freedom practitioner after his election into the office of vice president (Nesbitt 2018; Sanders 2018). Nesbitt (2018) argues that one of Mike Pence's antagonistic postures was when his staffers deleted comments on his official Facebook page that disagreed with his opposition to marriage for same-sex couples. Considering the personalized nature of a web 2.0 platform like Facebook, it is crucial to explore how a double-faced politician like Mike Pence employs Facebook to advance his political agenda. Poell (2013) argues that social media is an improvement on the mass media qualities of traditional media by adding unique and more personalized elements to them. Since social media posts are co-created by politicians and their media strategists (Campus 2010), this present study assessed the themes and ideologies espoused by Mike Pence on Facebook.

Related Studies on Political Discourse on Social Media

Research on social media discourse in political communication has taken several dimensions over the years. Especially after it became a focal point of scholarly interest after the 2008 US presidential election. Social media platforms such as Facebook have grown in relevance, following a shift from a "media-centric" to an "actor-centric" perspective in mediatization research in the political sphere (Esser and Strömbäck 2014, 227). This has increased political actors' reliance on co-created communication strategies with their strategists that suit the construction of specific public personae or identities (Campus 2010; Mazzoleni 2014). The construction of such identities centers around the language they use in public spaces such as social media. Scholars have taken different theoretical and methodological approaches to analyze several facets of social media's role in political discourse. They have answered critical questions about its ever-evolving relevance in the field. Several Political officeholders and political actors use web 2.0 platforms, like

Facebook, in their communication to spread their opinions and ideological perspectives as well as to construct their identities (Ross and Bürger 2014). Research on content and language utilized by politicians on social media has been advanced by scholars in different disciplines (such as political science, linguistics, communication studies, sociology, computer science, etc.) (Krzyzanowski and Tucker 2018).

The interest in the role of language in spreading personal/political ideological perspectives on social media is critical to advance arguments about the ever-evolving phenomenon. Scholars argue that political officeholders build relationships, which translates to followers via their choice of words/language, which embeds their ideologies and party identification (Hogg 2010; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2016). Blankenship (2020) studied President Donald Trump's Twitter expressions when firing government officials—which, according to the scholar, was his primary tool of public communication and observed that the president displayed a “tactical populist” ideology in his discourse to express his raw emotions. Blankenship's findings comport with the arguments raised by the scholars cited earlier in this paper (Hogg 2010; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2016) about how studying the language discourse of a political officeholder on social media can help you determine a politician's ideological perspective. Garrett, Carnahan, and Lynch (2011) claim that the emergence of social media has democratized the expression of ideological views without restriction—a phenomenon that did not exist in the era of traditional media. Therefore, this implies that social media has empowered individuals with cost-effective mass communication tools that traditional media deprived them of to spread messages with ideological underpinnings. Similarly, Engesser et al. (2017) studied politicians' Twitter and Facebook posts from four West European countries (Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) to uncover the salient ideologies. The scholars observed that the politicians articulated the salient ideology of populism by posting messages that emphasized the people's sovereignty, advocated for people, ostracized others, invoked the heartland, and combined the people as well as the elite. These scholars believed populism was the salient post in the social media messages of politicians there because the countries had dominant populist parties (Kriesi and Pappas 2015). More recently, Kissas (2020) observed that Trump enacted populist and patriotic ideologies in his tweets through his display of national flags, his use of captions such as “I will stand with police and protect ALL

Americans!, #Debates2016 and #MAGA, as well as associating himself with officers in uniform. This then raises the question of what kind of ideologies would be present in the social media posts of a US vice president like Mike Pence. From the position of these scholars, social media has shifted the political discourse to an ideologically centered one, which is the corpus of this current study.

Vice-Presidential Discourse

Edwards and Jacobs (2008) believe that the paucity of literature on vice-presidential discourse in the US is because of the media's reluctance to cover occupants of the office. They further argue that the vice presidency became more relevant under President Carter, who delegated his vice to the function of an advisor, troubleshooter, and liaison of crucial constituencies. This meant that the media became more interested in the vice president's actions. Though the discourse of vice presidents has received little scholarly attention across media (both social and traditional), a few studies have tried to explore this "grey area" in political research. For instance, Bostdorff (1991) posits that the role of a vice President to the president is synonymous with that of a spouse, and this affects the discourse of the vice president, which is often supportive of the president, just like how a good spouse supports a partner through every situation. The author's position implies that vice presidents will support the president in good and bad times to demonstrate loyalty or commitment to the "relationship." Following a similar line of argument, Willyard and Ritter (2005) observed that Vice President Cheney's victory speech had a salient theme of declaring victory; however, the authors observed congruence between what he said and what Bush said. This supports Bostdorff's position because the agreement in speech can be described as synonymous with a spouse publicly agreeing with a partner. It would be interesting to assess the discourse constructs of Vice President Pence to assess whether this argument still holds in the social media era.

Other scholars have also analyzed vice-presidential discourse on topical or controversial issues in the US media and political spheres. For example, Herbig (2012) observed that Vice President Dan Quayle's attack on a fictional television character in his speech generated a unique public discourse

on family values, which became the media and public agenda. From Herbig's argument, the discourse of vice presidents can also prompt public discourse, highlighting another reason this area of research should be further probed. This contradicts Edwards and Jacobs' argument about the media's reluctance to cover issues regarding vice-presidential discourse. Riley and Hollihan (2012) also observed that Vice President Joe Biden's solidarity-themed speech during his diplomatic visits to Jerusalem in 2010 fueled some controversy between the two allies. Hence, the Israeli Prime Minister's (Benjamin Netanyahu) actions after Biden's speech was deemed a betrayal. One key takeaway from Riley and Hollihan's observation is that in as much as other scholars (e.g., Edwards and Jacobs 2008) relegate the importance of the vice president, quite akin to a president, a vice president's discourse can be an indicator of a country's position, which makes vice-presidential discourse crucial to public diplomacy. Considering this background, a study examining a vice president's discourse on a social media platform advances a critical area of scholarship.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The CDA approach has been a crucial methodological and theoretical framework in studying discourses over the past three decades. Bayram (2010) argues that discourses, whether spoken or written, emanate from various sources distinguished by power relations, social statuses, etc., and are crucial to social construction and identity formation. This means that the study of discourses can give researchers underlying societal themes in different cultural contexts. Scholars claim that the CDA approach is one of the most suitable interdisciplinary approaches for describing and analyzing texts to highlight from the perspective of their socio-political implications (Fairclough 2010; Poole 2010). Scholars have adopted the CDA approach to examine various forms of discourse, such as political language (Nartey 2020; Krzyżanowski and Tucker 2018), news content (Gagniarre 2016), and many other discursive devices to uncover existing themes as well as ideologies.

Fairclough (1995) argues that the methodological and theoretical efficiency of the CDA makes it ideal for uncovering the ideological implications of the texts, as well as the existence of power play. Taking Fairclough's position on the CDA approach in studying the underlying ideologies in

the corpus of text, the CDA approach becomes an important framework for this current study. KhosraviNik and Unger (2015) also argue that applying CDA on social media platforms does not flaw its scholarly value because such platforms provide public spheres that mirror the larger society and further claim that textual analysis highlights the ideology of the text. KhosraviNik and Unger's claim comports with Fairclough's claim and further gives CDA a significant turn in its application on digital platforms. This present study will extend the CDA approach to a different object of analysis (Facebook discourse) used by a vice president to build on literature.

Methods

The US vice president was selected for this study based on the description attributed to their democracy exemplary for studies on political discourse (Sikanku 2019). We manually copied 153 textual posts from the official Facebook timeline of Mike Pence from June 12, 2019, to November 2, 2019. Two significant events informed the consideration for this sample. June 2019 was six months from the 2020 election year. From our foreknowledge as political discourse scholars, we believe it has a significant effect on the discourse of politicians. Also, President Trump's impeachment hearings in Congress were taking place around this period, which we believe was a historical period in US politics. Though we cannot point to the vice president posting on Facebook himself like Trump, we believe he played a role in the content, following the arguments advanced by mediatization scholars such as Campus (2010) and Mazzoleni (2014) about the co-construction of public identities between politicians and their strategists, through vehicles such as political discourse.

This current study is qualitative and explorative since our object of analysis is rarely studied. Our analysis focused on posts with words only. To analyze the themes and ideologies in the posts, we employed Fairclough's (2010) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) three-staged model, which comprises the description, interpretation, and explanation of Mike Pence's Facebook posts. At the description stage of our data analysis, we gave meaning to the texts by coding the salient themes by reading the sentences from the posts. Subsequently, we interpreted the themes by situating them into underlying ideologies and finally explained the posts in the socio-political and historical contexts of the US, drawing potential implications. Fairclough's CDA model is a "gold standard"

in political discourse analysis. Van Dijk (1997) argues that political discourse analysis is critical because it encapsulates political power, abuse, and resistance. For this current study, the definition of the theme we adopted is one provided by Benoit et al. (1998, 49), who posit that “a theme can comprise a short phrase or as long as several sentences.” This current study also adopts Hall’s (1986, 29) definition of ideology, which is “the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.”

Analysis and Discussions

Comporting to Benoit et al.’s (1998) definition of theme and Fairclough’s CDA approach, we analyzed the data gathered over the period of this study. After reading the posts, we identified (Fairclough 2010) five salient themes in Vice President Mike Pence’s Facebook posts: *Criticism of Democrats, citizen appreciation, spousal support, border discourse, and religious affirmation*. Our analyses are as follows.

Criticism of Democrats

This included posts that criticized or cast members of the Democratic party in a negative light, as well as attacks on previous policies by the Barack Obama administration. An example was one he posted on October 10, 2019, which read:

“President Trump negotiated the largest trade deal in American history, but Speaker Pelosi & the Democrats in Congress refused to bring it to the floor. I came to Iowa to TURN UP THE HEAT & say it’s time for Congress to DO THEIR JOB, put politics aside & pass the #USMCA.”

A similar post under this theme was one he posted on October 31, 2019, which read:

“I have some serious concerns with the way the closed-door depositions were run & am skeptical that we will have a process that is open, transparent & fair...going down this path is a mistake." Impeachment obsessed Dems should listen to Collin Peterson”.

Criticism of Democrats was a salient theme in Mike Pence's posts. This is not a surprising theme, considering Mike Pence is a traditional Republican who has risen through the ranks and been at the forefront of banter with Democrats in Congress and other political battlegrounds throughout his career. Also, it is not surprising because of the ongoing impeachment hearings of President Donald Trump at the time of this study, which ended in the House approving articles of impeachment. These issues were critical areas for his criticism of the Democrats, just like the president did during the hearings. By using such discourse, the vice president constructed an identity (Mazzoleni 2014) of a forward-looking politician who cares about the progress of America. Statements such as “President Trump negotiated the largest trade deal in American history...,” recontextualize (Fairclough 2010) Trump’s achievement as unprecedented and cast the Democrats in a negative light, as enemies of progress by their resistance to the trade deal. This sets a public agenda of resentment against the Democrats, following Herbig’s (2012) argument that vice presidential discourse can set the public agenda.

In addition, in the second example, Mike Pence’s criticism of the Democrats for the lack of transparency in the impeachment hearing evokes the thought of bias on the part of democrats. This can also be identified as Mike Pence’s supportive role as a good political “spouse” to Trump, who was also critical of the Democrats during his impeachment hearings, supporting Bostdorff’s (1991) argument. We believe Mike Pence’s criticism of the democrats is mediated by the power relations between himself, President Trump, and the Republican party. Openly showing support for the president psychologically reiterated his unflinching support for him and guaranteed his selection as running mate in the 2020 elections since it is the president’s prerogative. It also portrays him as a genuine member of the Republican party. This enhances his political capital within the party, which essentially described the impeachment hearing as a witch-hunting expedition. Lastly, his criticism of the Democrats is reminiscent of two of Engesser et al. 's (2017) descriptions of the populist-oriented discourse, which; ostracizes others and invokes the heartland. Despite the hostile intent of his criticisms against the Democrats, he uses civil language compared to Trump, which his portfolio can explain as a vice president compared to the language he used as a Governor and a Congressperson. This turn of decorum in his discourse portrays him as more presidential (Ting and Moffit 2016).

Citizen Appreciation

Citizen appreciation encapsulates celebrating the hard work of individuals from the US who have achieved incredible feats in business and other fields. It also includes celebrating groups and services like the Police, Army, Fire Service, etc. National heroes or elders, living or dead, who are honored, are considered under this theme. Lastly, posts about the Vice President's association with citizens are considered under this theme. An excerpt of this theme can be found in a post on September 20, 2019, which read:

“It was an honor to be at 1 Police Plaza yesterday with officers of the New York Police Department who put on the uniform and stand on the thin blue line each day! On behalf of a grateful nation, thank you for your service!”

Another example of this theme was his Facebook post on October 24, 2020, which read:

“Congratulations to an accomplished businessman and humanitarian Roger Penske on receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom! As a result of Roger’s inspiring passion and drive, he is a sports and business icon, and it was an honor to celebrate him tonight!”

The Vice President celebrated several individuals and groups who contributed their skills and labor to America’s development. Such groups and individuals included entrepreneurs, national heroes, and others. Mike Pence’s use of such a discursive approach constructs a public persona of a leader who cares about ordinary individuals working to make a difference in America. Again, his direct praise for the police service is antithetical to positions held by some Democrats, who advocate for defunding the police, following their wrong killing of innocent citizens, which can be described as an indirect criticism of the Democrats. His celebration and association with ordinary citizens comport with Engesser et al. 's (2017) populist-oriented theme of combining the people and the elite, while his association with the police comports with Trump’s association with the police as highlighted by Kissas (2020). This theme recontextualizes (Fairclough 2010) President Donald Trump's campaign slogan, “Making America great again,” as the vice president's open compliments for the police and citizens bring to bear the role ordinary Americans play in building

their own country. Besides, considering he is next in line to the Presidency, these acts can be interpreted as ways of endearing himself with the people.

Spousal Support

Spousal support is evident in his posts that state the Second lady's errands with the Vice President. Posts that indicate the Second lady is accompanying the vice president to an event and any form of a post that appreciates or expresses thanks to the Second lady for her supportive role to the vice president in delivering his constitutional and delegated responsibilities. Mike Pence openly includes discourse about his spouse giving her national exposure. An excerpt of this theme can be found in a post on September 16, 2019, which read:

"The Second Lady and I are wheels up to Montana! While there, I will receive a briefing from the High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force and the Yellowstone Substance Abuse Coalition, deliver remarks at the Riverstone Health Clinic and visit Yellowstone National Park".

Similarly, his post on June 13, 2020, comports to this as it read:

"Everyone at Yellowstone National Park gives countless families the opportunity to enjoy Creation in all its natural glory—& it was an honor to experience Old Faithful with the Second Lady!"

His salient use of this discourse constructs his identity as a responsible man since voters and conservatives consider marriage commitment, especially by politicians, to be a sign of responsibility and competence (Auer et al. 2022). The conservatives highly eschewed allegations of extra-marital affairs that have smeared politicians in the past, like former President Bill Clinton. The constant acknowledgment of his spouse can also be interpreted as his spouse's "audition" as the First Lady, as Simon (1996) argues that wives of American presidents play an essential role in the political success of their spouses. Mike Pence's posts about his spouse can be interpreted as also endearing his spouse to the people, as he is doing for himself. This attaches a level of "presidentliness" to his public persona, particularly considering the open and uncivil discourse he employed while a Senator and a Governor, particularly about women (Villines 2016).

Border discourse

This theme is associated with posts highlighting issues like illegal migrations, human trafficking, and some dangers related to the US, Mexico, and Canada border. It includes a call for action and advocacy regarding bills/ laws on border issues. For instance, a post on July 12, 2019, read.

“We have a CRISIS at our border. This year, we are on track to apprehend more than one million migrants on our southern border. The time to address this humanitarian crisis and secure our border is NOW.”

His post on August 21, 2019, follows a similar tandem as it read:

“Saw firsthand the rigorous training CBP officers go through at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia. Thanks to the strong stand of President Trump and more help from Mexico, border apprehensions are down 40% in the last two months. The American people are proud of our courageous CBP who secure our border & face dangers everyday (600 attacks this year) and save lives everyday (4,000 rescues this year). Thank you to all the incredible men and women of our CBP!”

Unsurprisingly, border discourse is a salient theme in Vice President Mike Pence’s Facebook posts. Ever since the Trump administration took over, they have been vocal about tightening immigration rules; they have also signed the NAFTA trade deal, they introduced some strict policies such as international students showing their Facebook pages to immigration officers before being allowed into the US and Trump’s big idea about building a wall around the US borders. Also high on the administration’s agenda was the US, Mexico, and Canada agreement, which was very common in Mike Pence’s Facebook posts. Regarding the NAFTA trade deal, Mike Pence was a vocal advocate as he was seen pushing the US Congress to pass the bill on several occasions. He has been reported in some news outlets for his intensive advocacy in his own Indiana state. Reiterating this in his Facebook posts indicates its paramount importance to the Trump administration. Also, its importance was further confirmed when the president stated signing the

NAFTA trade deal as one of his administration's outstanding achievements in the 2020 State of the Union address. The congruence of their voices was no coincidence, for it further indicates the chemistry between President Trump and Mike Pence, which comports to Willyard and Ritter's (2005) argument about the congruence in the discourse of presidents and their vice presidents. Mike Pence's open praise for the Customs and Border Protection agency (CBP) is synonymous with the citizen appreciation theme and his use of words such as "American people are proud of CBP" comports to Engesser et al. (2017) argument about invoking the heartland. This recontextualizes (Fairclough 2010) the ideology of patriotism and populism, which are traits synonymous with conservatives. Lastly, his praise for Trump is again mediated by the power relations between a president and vice president.

Religious Affirmation

The religious affirmation theme includes posts that mention the Vice President's faith or any religious sentiment expressed on his timeline in a personal or collective manner (e.g., for the country). Any post that makes mention of God falls under this theme. For example, a post on July 4, 2019, read:

"Today marks 243 years since our Founding Fathers created a country rooted in the beliefs of justice and liberty – Historical facts/patriotism God bless our great Nation and those who devote their lives to protecting our freedoms! Happy #IndependenceDay from our family to yours!"

Another example is his post on September 4, 2019, which reads:

"Thank you for a great visit! To all the good people of Ireland, may the road rise to meet you, may the wind be always at your back, may the sunshine warm upon your face, may the rains fall soft upon your fields, & until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand."

Pence continually used the name of God, Jesus, and other faith-related words in his Facebook posts. We believe this reinforces the vice president's identity as a person of Faith, as he has been described as a principled conservative and a Christian (Nesbitt 2018). Even during his time as a

congressperson, he was one of the people who kicked against same-sex marriages in the US. Mike Pence's religiosity has been a consistent part of his political career, which was one of the reasons Cillizza (2016) cites as why President Trump chose him as running mate to appease the social conservatives. The vice president also leads the Trump administration's charge to bring the Evangelical community on board for reelection. He engaged the Central Florida Evangelical Latinos, touting religious liberty as one of the Trump administration's key achievements (NBC Miami 2020). His use of such discourse highlights his consistency to his "true self" and portrays him as authentic, and this can be described as personalization because he expresses his personal beliefs.

Mike Pence's Thematic Discourse

We observed five salient themes in Vice President Mike Pence's timeline posts. Bajar (2017) argues that Facebook has heralded the phenomenon of virtual identity. This article helps us better understand Vice President Pence's virtual identity as the second-highest officeholder in the US (in the context of this paper), and considering the uncertainties surrounding Trump's presidency at the time of this study (impeachment hearings), Vice President Pence, portrayed himself as an aspirational leader based on his discourse of celebrating the American people, a true conservative based on his religious discourse and a happily married politician based on his steadfast support of his wife. The thematic focus of his Facebook discourse implied he portrayed himself as a president-in-waiting by portraying a president-like persona: Mike Pence gives his views/stance about issues, most corroborating the perspective of President Donald Trump or his Republican party. Mike Pence's Facebook discourse dovetails into the administration's grand agenda of "Making America Great Again." His discourse is more presidential in his office as vice president than in his previous roles, which connotes his realization of constructing a more acceptable public persona, considering the importance of the role and how close he is to the presidency.

Interpretation of Themes into Ideologies

In the second research question, we sought to interpret and explain (Fairclough 2010) the ideologies in the Facebook posts of Mike Pence, and below were the ideologies observed in his

Facebook discourse. This current study also adopts Hall's (1986) definition of ideology, as defined earlier in this paper.

Conservatism

Vice President Mike Pence's Facebook posts recontextualize conservative values. Themes such as religious affirmation, spousal support, criticizing Democrats, and citizen celebration highlight his conservative values. Conventional wisdom indicates that Republicans demonstrate extreme Christian-centric discourse in their language and usually maintain strong religious values, which can also explain his strong spousal support of his wife. In addition, conservatives typically have strong opinions about immigration. They have been vocal about issues surrounding the border, so many of the themes in Mike Pence's Facebook posts can be described as a display of his conservative values, being a former member of Congress and Governor himself. His open celebration of the American people and criticizing Democrats, as indicated by the salient theme of citizen appreciation, can be described as populism because it portrays him as a man of the people and one who believes in the masses, which comports with Engesser et al.'s (2017) definition of populist messages. Populism here can be described as an offshoot of conservatism because conservatives portray themselves as a populist party. Casero-Ripollés, Sintes-Olivella, and Franch (2017) argue that one of the components of populism is evinced in the rejection of immigration and minorities. The salience of populism in Mike Pence's Facebook discourse is attributable to the dominance of populist parties in the US (Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Clear evidence of this is in the border discourse of Mike Pence's posts. This then comports with Blankenship's argument about employing social media for strategic populism, as he beneficially uses populism to advance his party's agenda and improve his political capital. The salience of conservatism in Pence's Facebook discourse can be polarizing (Unver 2017) to anyone who reads his posts because they reinforce partisan sentiments, especially considering the context of this study (during Trump's impeachment hearings). Considering the broad reach of Facebook, Mike Pence enhances his image amongst the Republican party hierarchy and voters, reinforcing the actor-centric argument made by Esser and Strömbäck (2014).

Mediated-Trumpism

Fuchs (2017) defines Trumpism as a political ideology that focuses or centers on President Trump as a brand, political leader, and business leader. Pence's mediated communication on Facebook reflects a Trump-like persona as a loyal supporter of President Donald Trump and a traditional conservative. His Facebook discourses around democratic criticism, citizen appreciation, and border discourse mirrored the salient topics President Donald Trump has talked about over the period. Secondly, the vice president's Facebook discourse portrays President Trump as a "demigod" who has excellent leadership skills and runs a perfect administration. This is demonstrated even when he criticized the Democrats—he started his posts by showering praises on President Trump. In his mediated discourse, everything about President Trump is the ideal approach. This again supports Bostdorff's (1991) argument of Vice Presidents being political spouses. Another reason that we believe Mike Pence displayed this ideology of mediated-Trumpism because Vice President Pence had not yet been confirmed as running mate by the president for the 2020 elections; his constant support for Trump ultimately cemented his position as running mate. This suggested that his discourse was mediated by the power relation argued by Bayram (2010). The congruence in their discourses is synonymous with what Willyard and Ritter (2005) pointed out about the agreement in Vice President Cheney's and President George Bush's victory speeches. Though Mike Pence never openly disagreed with Trump while things seemed good, this congruence was absent in the outcome of the 2020 election when Trump asked Mike Pence to overturn the 2020 electoral results through a constitutional provision. Mike Pence's open defiance against Trump indicated a shift in that power relations, especially after the latter had lost. The performance of mediated-Trumpism can also be described as conservatism because President Trump was also the de facto leader of the Republicans who subscribed to the conservative ideology.

Conclusion

In this exploratory study, we sought to uncover the salient themes and ideologies in the Facebook posts of US Vice President Pence on his page (@Vice-president Mike Pence). Employing Fairclough's three-tiered CDA model, we observed five salient themes: Criticism of the

Democrats, citizen appreciation, spousal support, border discourse, and religious affiliation. We argue that these themes recontextualize (Fairclough 2010) the ideologies of “mediated Trumpism” and conservatism. We also observed that Mike Pence employed a more decorous discourse in his Facebook posts as Vice President compared to his time as Governor and congressperson. We argue that Mike Pence’s Facebook discourse portrayed him like a president in waiting during Trump’s impeachment hearing as he gave prominence to his wife and expressed strong opinions about issues of national as well as international interest to the US. He further explicated the agenda of the Trump administration and the Republican party, which we argue enhanced his political capital among the Republican party and voters. He demonstrates unflinching support for the President by openly touting his achievement and persona, and his posts were congruent with some of Trump’s media discourse. This is reminiscent of Willyard and Ritter’s (2005) position on the congruity between presidential and vice-presidential discourse. We argue that this is mediated by the power relations between a president and his vice when we juxtapose that with Mike Pence’s open defiance to overturn the 2020 election results as suggested by Trump.

Our study provides a benchmark study for understanding vice-presidential discourse on social media to engage in public diplomacy and expands the scope of the CDA approach. Considering this study’s focus was on the US vice President, the US, findings cannot be understood to describe how vice Presidents use Facebook. Future studies can compare the Facebook posts of the US Vice President with other countries or extend the CDA approach to analyze the discourse employed by vice presidents across continental divides.

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