

Finding Political Balance in Times of Political Inconsistency

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Being able to identify connections is critical in our profession. We find sorting through hours of interviews, hundreds of documents, and thousands of words comforting. We use phrases such as “swim in the data” and “soak up the stories” to describe the intensive process of conducting critical/cultural qualitative research. The ways we describe our work are often akin to water. It is a vital element to our survival. It can be the most calming presence yet also the most volatile and unexpected. The qualitative research as water similes allows us to explore our paradigmatic fluidity and expand our space to fit even the tightest routes or tributaries. To see our work like water means to see our research as life-giving and sustaining.

That value of nourishment is how I intend to approach my editorship.

What you will see throughout volume 48 is a common thread despite disparate ideas, topics, and beliefs. Each issue will be themed and an opportunity for readers to soak in the stories of our colleagues’ research. The hope is that each theme provides sustenance of mind and thought while also challenging us to think critically about how to navigate the future of our field. How do we make our research sustainable? How do we allow our narratives to flow like water, providing life to our field and those in it? How do we rise with the tides to make our worlds more equitable, just, and inclusive? This is my challenge as managing editor this year, and I hope you will ride along with me on this journey of cultural understanding and critical inquiry. As we traverse the rapids of academic peer review and encounter the waves of power and privilege associated, let us find solace in wading in the waters of our scholarship—sharing in the opportunity to swim together as one.

This Issue

The story of volume 48, issue 1, is of political identity. In the pages of this *Journal of Communication Inquiry* are eight peer-reviewed articles and one book review that focus on the theme of “Political Discourse and Positionality.” The lead article in this issue, “‘Well, It’s Election Day ... Again’: How a Multi-day Memetic Narrative Captured the World’s Collective Anticipation during the 2020 ‘Election Week Limbo’” by Jessica Birthisel, Stacie Meihaus Jankowski, and Tara Kelley, brings memes to the attention of our research community. In the article, the authors analyzed memes from 2020 encompassed both timeless and timely references, with some reflecting the unique aspects of that year, including the pandemic and the U.S. election. These

election week memes stood out due to their narrative complexity, unlike single-image memes that often dominate meme culture. They followed a storytelling structure, with Acts I to V mirroring the election's unfolding drama, momentarily uniting a fragmented digital audience before diverging into politically divisive content. This collaborative meme narrative demonstrated the power of memes to sustain evolving stories during significant events, providing a collective outlet for a stressed and socially distanced audience seeking relief and connection in a tumultuous time. The article provides a foundation for our ability to think about the texts we study and the innovative ways we can tell the stories of what we learn.

In the second lead article of this issue, Nathan Katz, in his article "Polling, Partisanship, and Promoting Violence: New Developments in Impression Management From Candidate and Super PAC Advertisements," emphasized the significance of performance types in political advertising, showing how candidates and Super PACs use them to convey their messages and engage with the public. It highlights the evolution of these performance types, particularly the emergence of the "warrior" archetype with violent undertones in 2016, indicative of a broader trend toward democratic erosion. The research also underscores the need for further study, especially in online advertising, other interest groups, and nonpresidential elections, while suggesting that performance types of analysis can extend beyond political advertisements to other forms of media.

Our issue then moves into two distinct areas with three articles a piece: representation and globalized identities. The first three articles emphasize the desire to understand more deeply how positionality is necessary to contend with political knowledge and discourse. These articles include:

- Religious Identity, Politics, and the Media: What White Evangelical Christian Women's Religious Identity Reveals About Their Endorsement of Donald J. Trump and Distrust of News Outlets by Gayle Jansen Brisbane
- Political Purpose and the Development of Mediatisation: Considering Media Representations and News Management During the Coal Dispute of 1984-5 by Frances Myers
- The Death of Fordism and the Family Wage in Labor Documentaries: A Feminist Analysis by Kathryn A. Cady

We then interrogate the role of globalized political discourse and how our scholars believe identity and positionality emerge beyond traditional means of political speech. Those three articles are:

- Ways of Seeing the Historic Process: An Analysis of the Spots from the Spanish Election Campaign of April 2019 by Marcello Serrahtps and Rayco González
- Syria and Political Cartoons from the Perspective of the Cartoonist Ali Ferzat by Salud Adelaida Flores Borjabad

- The Political Branding of a Powerless Nation: A Historical Account of the Branding of Kuwait During the Reign of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem (1950–1965) by Ali A. Dashtihttps, Ali A. Al-Kandari, Talal M. Almutairi, Albaraa F. Altourah, and Abdulmohsen Jamal

This issue closes with a book review by Briana Trifiro. She shares why *Why We're Polarized* by Ezra Klein is essential reading in our courses, especially if you are teaching anything related to political discourse, polarization, and identity.

Until the next issue. Float on.

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