


COMM 101 Final Paper

Joe Biden's Presidential Acceptance Speech

One of the biggest events in United States history took place during this semester and that was the 2020 presidential election. On November 7th, Joe Biden made his acceptance speech in a defeat over President Donald Trump for the office of President. I watched his speech on YouTube 4 hours after it had originally aired and was moved by the choices he made when it came to moving our country forward. Biden's speech maintained an emphasis on unity and being a president for everybody. Rather than focusing on his victory over the Republican party, Biden sought to redirect the division of blue and red states and move forward with the healing of our country in a united manner. Being a president for "everybody" is a decisive move, while it may seem like it is not. It is decisive in the manner that he is choosing not to fall further into a divide of blue and red, but walk forward in unity instead. Furthermore, the context of this speech is a unique one because it exists in a peculiar moment in American history. From a ruthless pandemic, to racial tensions across the country, Biden is tasked with addressing several key issues and understanding the space in which this speech takes place is important. In this paper, I will apply concepts of communication in my analysis of president-elect Joe Biden's acceptance speech to show that he has a progressive, uniting vision for America.


While we are yet to see if this is truly the case, through his acceptance speech, Joe Biden came across as a socioemotional leader(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.173). A socioemotional leader is a leader who prioritizes the feelings of group members and is focused on making them feel comfortable and understood. Biden, with his tone and vocabulary, made sure to walk down



the middle of the division that he spoke so familiar of. While pointing out the fragile state of our nation, Biden made a point to address mistreated, minority communities and offer them words of reassurance. A socioemotional leader aims to make those who follow them feel valued. Biden did this by acknowledging that he only got to his position with the support of minorities and that he plans to have their back going forward just as they had his. Biden's socioemotional leadership style provides a great foundation for his uniting vision because many Americans currently feel undervalued and underappreciated by the current administration.

In order to provide a progressive vision of America, Biden had to appeal to those in his out-group(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.166). Out-groups are disgruntled members of a group who feel unappreciated and undervalued and can be a pivotal force in the success of a group. Biden's attempt to appeal and connect with his out-group shows a fundamental understanding of what makes a group successful. One of Biden's methods of connecting with this out-group was declaring that his cabinet and his team would be representative of America, which is to say it will have diversity and inclusion. Having leader's who are representative of the body it is leading is an important component of steering the country in a new direction. Many minority communities are neglected and feel unheard in the movements of government due to the echo-chamber within the government. Change is difficult to instill when those elected to represent communities fail to actually take into account the troubles plaguing their people.


Introducing fresh perspective and those from a group outside of rich, straight, white males is a large step in catering to underserved communities. This need to shift the tide falls in line with Irving Janis' research on groupthink (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.166) as he believed that incorporating outsiders into a group would upset in-groups and reduce the groupthink. Therefore, Biden's incorporation of individuals from all backgrounds to create a diverse decision



making committee is aimed at avoiding a repeat of past mistakes and implementing ideas from outside an echo chamber. Rather than having individuals with little to no desire to take care of hurting communities in America, filling these seats with diverse individuals with conflicting interests at heart will foster growth and change within the government and the bodies of power that have the ability to instill change.

Biden spent the first part of his speech like an actor would an Oscar acceptance speech, shouting out and thanking individuals who have supported him. In Biden's case it was his extended family(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.145). An extended family consists of family outside of a nuclear family, as well as the nuclear family itself. An important note of extended family is that it may include deceased relatives. This is relevant to Joe Biden and his extended family because of his son, Beau Biden who passed away. In his speech, Biden spoke about the strength he and his extended family exhibited after Beau had passed and he shared similar wisdom with the country, imploring them to be strong as COVID-19 affects American families.

President-elect Joe Biden delivered his speech indoors in his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware. However, he still faced environmental distractions(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.110) from the audience that came to attend his victory speech. Environmental distraction is when the physical location has loud or competing noises that can get in the way of listening and speaking. Most of the distractions during this speech came from the audience, whether this be cheering, clapping, or car horns. These audience noises were their only way of participating and expressing their support for the speaker. However, these noises provided a barrier for listening, not only from the perspective of the audience, but also from the perspective of the speaker. These competing sources of sound provided an environmental distraction, however I think that these




noises offered more benefits than they did distractions because they offered a boost of morale and support for the future president and his followers.

While addressing the nation, Biden elected to use high code(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.48) in order to maintain a level of professionalism. High code is a way of speaking that centers around being formal and official. Rather than use casual, informal language, Biden addressed the nation in a professional manner as is expected of those in office. Using high code established a foundation of credibility for the administration because using sophisticated, appropriate language instills confidence in the listener and in the country. Therefore, Biden was already using his platform to move the country into a more progressive and professional era with his use of high code.

Biden places special emphasis on freedom and individual rights for all Americans and it clearly demonstrates how America is an individualist culture(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.91). Individualist cultures center around a belief system that emphasizes the individual and his or her personal dreams and rights. Within his speech, Joe Biden made a point to reach out to the dreamers in America, as well as other minority groups who don't have a steady path to citizenship. America's individualist mindset was apparent when Biden implored dreamers to follow their dreams and when he promised to put America back into a good light when it comes to following your passions.


Biden, having had experience as a vice-president, is aware that it takes a competent team to run a country, and therefore is no stranger to interdependence(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.165). Interdependence is the reliance of a group on its' individual members' collaboration and teamwork. In his speech, Biden made sure to shout-out and recognize several members of his team, including vice-president elect Kamala Harris. Therefore, it is clear that interdependence is



essential for the success of, not the individual, but the group leading America. As a former vice president, Biden understands the importance of teamwork when navigating the tricky path ahead the country. Between eradicating the coronavirus and taking care of underserved communities, it will take a team of understanding and passionate people to accomplish these tasks. Furthermore, healing the country, as Biden said he would do, is a difficult task because America encourages individual thought and the expression of one's ideas. Therefore, Biden and his team have to work together to capitalize on the few things Americans do agree on. In order to do this, much like taking care of minority communities, Biden must acknowledge and take care of those who are contributing members to his team.

Appreciating and taking care of members of the team is something Biden must be familiar with because he was once a supporting member of Barack Obama's team. In a study by Radostina Purvanova on interdependence (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.165) she claimed that, especially so in individualistic cultures, it is important that individual contributions are appreciated and acknowledged to the group because it may lead to a future decrease in effort and motivation. I think Biden sought to avoid this when he praised Harris for her work so far and vouched for her capability and capacity going forward. This credit allows for a healthy form of leadership that will provide a positive starting point for the new presidency.


When looking forward at the next four years, Biden issued several calls to action. These calls to action were related to fighting the virus, fighting racial injustices, and repairing the division across America. When calling upon the people of America, Biden used altercasting (Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.34). Altercasting is how our language can impose a specific identity on people, it can also confirm or deny someone's identity. In the case of his victory speech, Biden imposed the identity of being American on those he was addressing. With



rhetoric like “My fellow Americans” or “It is our duty as Americans”, Biden imposed the red, white, and blue identity upon those listening. This forces those listening to respond as either American or un-American. Altercasting provided a bridge for those who opposed Biden to cross over and walk as one, American body towards a better tomorrow.


Altercasting, however, can be seen in a positive or negative light and this is reinforced by research on altercasting conducted by Gerald Marwell and David Schmitt(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.34). In this research they claimed that altercasting can give people an identity and doing so forces them to live up to the description, positive or negative. In this case, Biden employed altercasting to unite Americans under the umbrella of justice and democracy. Therefore, the use of altercasting in Biden’s speech can be looked at in a positive light as he is redefining the American identity to fight for justice and equality. Forcing Americans to support the pillars of democracy, by insinuating that not doing so is un-American is a way of framing justice in a new light. Fighting for minorities is an American act, as supposed by Biden.

As mentioned before, Biden’s victory speech had a focus on the emotions and feelings of those who were listening. However, at the core of his speech was a series of instrumental goals(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.184). Instrumental goals are goals that are a primary, driving force in the workplace and are focused on the completion of tasks and jobs. This focus on getting work done is typical of victory speeches because it helps establish credibility and trust with the country. Rather than focusing solely on comforting the American people, Biden elected to give them something concrete to hold on and look forward to. Biden’s claim that we have a decision to make regarding how we move forward uses the practice of establishing instrumental goals to unite Americans to work towards a common, united goal.




Biden's victory speech can be looked at as his first unofficial day of his new job. This perspective forces us to look at Biden's workplace identity, but more specifically his professional face(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.186). A professional face is the behavior and style of how someone presents themselves in a manner that is appropriate for the workplace. Biden's professional face consists of everything that he presented to his audience and to the camera during that speech. For example his upright stance and posture while making the speech played a large role in how the audience perceived him. However, more importantly, it demonstrated how serious this job is to him and his team. Biden's professional face was the only appropriate method of delivering his victory speech, as opposed to a casual, laid-back, passive speech.

Due to the televised nature of this event and the campaign that preceded it, Biden has established innumerable parasocial relationships(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.224) with many Americans. A parasocial relationship is one that is developed with characters and personalities from the media. Therefore, since Biden is often nationally broadcasted to millions of Americans, he is a media character that many Americans have a relationship with. An aspect of parasocial relationships is that people consider these media characters and personalities to be similar to family and friends and treated as such. Furthermore, with Biden discussing the importance of friends and family within his speech, many Americans may view him as a more personable figure and may rely on this parasocial relationship to connect with America's leaders. This positive perspective towards parasocial relationships is crucial for the Biden administration because of the current state of the country. With so few people being able to see others in person and interact face-to-face, Biden's establishment of parasocial relationships is important for the American people in feeling a connection to their leader and helping move forward together.




Finally, Joe Biden relied heavily on given beliefs(Duck and McMahan, 2018, p.241) in order to conjure avid and enthusiastic support during his speech. A given belief is a belief that the speaker believes almost everyone, if not everyone, in the audience will agree with. Employing given beliefs seems to be a popular method of getting the audience on the speaker's side. However in this case, the live, in-person audiences were mostly Biden supporters so what is the point of using given beliefs. First of all, these beliefs, while they may be popular, are the focal points of democracy and freedom. Fighting for individual's rights and equality for all are encouraged under democracy, therefore the root of Biden's policies seem to be preserving the democratic state. Secondly, Biden made a point to address the violent division across America and sought to use these given beliefs to unite both parties under democracy. Given beliefs such as "We must make the promises of this country real for everybody, no matter their race, ethnicity, faith, identity, or disability," allow for a more united vision of what is to come in the next four years.

In conclusion, president-elect Joe Biden's victory speech for this 2020 campaign has established a foundation for a progressive, more united America. Concepts of communication have allowed us to extensively analyze the context in which this speech exists and was delivered. Factoring in the massive two-party divide the country is experiencing, along with the unfortunate pandemic, as well as racial tensions within America, Joe Biden's speech provided an optimistic outlook on the next four years. Rather than actively seek out those who were opposing him and antagonize them, Biden chose to invite his opposition to join arms and move forward in uniting the country again. Part of establishing a progressive culture and mindset within the nation is looking after and tending to neglected communities within America. Minority communities showed overwhelming support for Biden, and he made a point to show his solidarity for their



efforts. In his effort to create a group of leaders that represent the country they are working for, Biden claimed that he plans to continue his efforts of diversity and inclusion. However, inclusion is not enough, it is merely the first step. As vice-president elect Harris was mentioned in his speech, there was also a promise to value minorities in America and allow them to have their voices heard.



Works Cited

Duck, S., & McMahan, D. T. (2018). *Communication in everyday life: A survey of communication / Steve Duck, David T. McMahan* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Reston, M., & Collinson, S. (2020, November 08). President-elect Joe Biden seeks to unite nation with victory speech. Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/07/politics/biden-victory-speech-2020-election/index.html>

Stevens, M. (2020, November 08). Read Joe Biden's President-Elect Acceptance Speech: Full Transcript. Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/article/biden-speech-transcript.html>