

Remediated Political Comedy, Presidential Candidates, and Character Assassination

Political comedy plays a major role in influencing evaluations of modern presidential politics, not only by means of candidate appearances, but also in terms of jokes made about (or at the expense of) presidential candidates (Becker, 2011). This project highlights the latter role, focusing on the references to the two major party presidential candidates in 2016, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. As political comedy has become more important as a force in the modern media environment, remediation of political comedy has also increased (Chadwick, 2013). Specifically, a common way for people to see political comedy is via the distribution online of shows originally aired on television, often broken into clips and shared on social media.

In order to determine how these combined forces affected what audiences saw from political comedy about the 2016 presidential candidates, I focus on three major political comedy programs that are regularly shared on social media: *The Daily Show* with Trevor Noah, *Last Week Tonight* with John Oliver, and *Full Frontal* with Samantha Bee. Using a combination of hand coding and computer assisted content analysis, I analyze these programs in terms of their mentions of Trump and Clinton, focusing on frequency, issues, and tone of mentions of each candidate, as well as how those elements vary by program.

This project uncovers the extent to which political comedy plays a role in providing positive and negative information about presidential candidates, an important aspect of character assassination in the political realm.