

APP campaigning: How presidential candidates present themselves by LINE and the responses of voters in the 2016 Taiwanese presidential election

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Abstract

LINE, an instant message App with a powerful capability of transmitting various forms of data, has been overwhelmed in Asia since launched in 2011. Due to its popularity, LINE was first used in the 2016 Taiwanese presidential election. This research utilized a functional approach of campaign communication discourse and political visual images to analyze how candidates managed and presented themselves by textual and visual information on LINE. Regarding the textual information, results revealed their strategy inclined to reverse gender stereotype because the female candidate emphasized policy over character, while the male emphasized character over policy. Both candidates did not fully employ ten image functions because they utilized mostly the emotional and image building functions. The female candidate message achieved the largest total amount of 'like' and 'share'. This study probes into the App campaigning and improve the feasibility and practicability to share knowledge of political communication by new media.

Keywords: *political communication, line, mobile App, functional theory*

1. Introduction

With the widespread popularity of smart phones, people especially rely on instant messaging (IM) applications as a primary way of communication. LINE, an IM App launched on June 23, 2011 in Japan, has been overwhelmed in Asia with a powerful capability of not only providing immediate and free messaging, but also transmitting various forms of digital files, such as voice messages, pictures, and videos. Besides, LINE offers user many emoticon stickers or expressive characters which allow users to simply use as a standalone message to convey a feeling or even represent an attitude. These features particularly appeared to young users.^[1] LINE has been ranked no. 1 in the free app category in 40 countries including Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, and more.^[2] At the LINE Conference Tokyo 2016, it was revealed that this app has grown into a global service surpassing one billion users and achieving an MAU (Monthly

Average Users) of 215 million. ^[3] Owing to its popularity, LINE company offered official account for politicians in 2013, starting in Japan, the App's home country. Later in 2014, LINE in Taiwan also offered this service which led to politicians' rush of opening LINE accounts because there were 17 million LINE registered users which was almost 91% of the population aged between 12 to 65. ^[4] The instant message app LINE was first applied in the 2016 Taiwanese presidential election. The Apps campaign was ubiquitous in the election 2016. ^[5] The strategy of how political candidates presenting themselves on Apps merits scholarly attention.

This research utilized a functional approach of campaign communication discourse ^[6] and political visual images ^[7] to analyze how candidates managed both textual and visual information during the Taiwanese presidential election in 2016. Furthermore, our study sought to compare whose strategy of self-presentation successful on LINE. We operationalize success by the number of "like" and "share" of candidate posts.

2. Theory

2.1 Functional approach of campaign messages

The functional theory of political discourse claims that candidates maintain their preferability by campaign messages with the three fundamental functions on two topics. ^[8] In order to accomplish a goal of persuading voters that a candidate was preferable than his or her opponents, the three fundamental functions of campaign discourse are acclaiming, attacking, and defending. Acclaiming portrays a candidate favorably through positive statements that emphasize the candidate's advantages, whereas attacking portrays an opposing candidate unfavorably through negative statements that highlight his or her disadvantages. Defending explicitly responds to a prior attack on the candidate. ^[9] Campaign discourse focus on topics of policy/issues and character/image.

Visual symbols play a central role in constructing images for politicians. However, their importance was not noticed. Schill argued that "the visual aspects of political communication remain one of the least studied and the least understood areas, and research focusing on visual symbols in political communication is severely lacking." ^[7, p. 119] By reviewing data on how candidates used visuals through what he termed the "image bite" in a concept similar to the sound bite, Schill provided a comprehensive overview which assessed political visual communication under ten functions: argument; agenda-setting; dramatization; emotion; image-building; identification; documentation; societal symbol; transportation; and ambiguity.

2.2 Research questions

Based on the discussion, five research questions were framed as following:

RQ 1: How do the candidates utilize LINE for campaigning?

RQ 2: What were the relative emphases on topics and functions of the candidate's text messages on LINE?

RQ 3: What were the relative emphases on functions of the candidate's visual symbols on LINE?

RQ 4: How do the candidates present themselves with text and visual symbols on LINE?

RQ 5: What were the responses by 'like' and 'share' to the various messages on the candidate's official LINE?

3. Methods

3.1 Sample

This study was conducted by a method of quantitative content analysis. All postings in two presidential

candidates' official LINE pages were collected starting from two months before the vote in the 2016 Taiwanese presidential election. The two major candidates in the election were KMT chair Eric Chu (male) and DPP chair Ing-Wen Tsai (female), both of whom were not incumbent. All LINE posts with text and/or visual images were analyzed. There were thirty-eight posts collected from Tsai's page and forty five posts from Chu's page.

3.2 Coding

The coding process was based on the functional approach of campaign communication discourse and political visual images as discussed earlier. The text of each Facebook post was coded as a function (acclaim, attack, or defense) under a main topic (policy or character), and the imagery was coded as a function of the ten (argument, agenda-setting, dramatization, emotion, image-building, identification, documentation, societal symbol, transportation, and ambiguity).

4. Result

RQ 1: How do the candidates utilize LINE for campaigning?

Most messages were structured by text with visual symbols. Five messages were text only by Chu and three were imagery only by Tsai (Table 1).

Table 1. Statistics of the candidate's LINE messages

	Text only	Imagery only	Text/Imagery	Total
Tsai (female)	0(0%)	3(8%)	35(92%)	38
Chu (male)	5(11%)	0(0%)	40(89%)	45

RQ 2: What were the relative emphases on topics and functions of the candidate's text messages on LINE?

The female candidate Tsai emphasized policy over character, while the male candidate Chu emphasized character over policy. Both candidates stressed the function of acclaiming. They did not utilize defending at all (Table 2).

Table 2. Statistics of text topics and functions

	Topic		Function		
	policy	character	acclaiming	attacking	defending
Tsai	21(60%)	14(40%)	29(83%)	6(17%)	0(0%)
Chu	14(35%)	26(65%)	38(95%)	2(5%)	0(0%)

RQ 3: What were the relative emphases on various functions of the candidate's visual symbols on LINE?

A visual symbol with emotional function was the most utilized by Tsai, and the next was image building. While, image building function were utilized the most by Chu, and the next was emotion (Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3. Statistics of imagery of various functions on Tsai's LINE

Imagery Function	Policy	Character	Total
Agenda Setting	2 (9.5%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (5.7%)
Emotion	11 (52.40%)	7 (50.00%)	18 (51.40%)
Image Building	6 (28.60%)	6 (42.90%)	12(34.30%)
Societal Symbol	1 (4.80%)	1 (7.10%)	2 (5.70%)
Ambiguity	1 (4.80%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (2.90%)
Total	21 (100%)	14 (100%)	35(100%)

Table 4. Statistics of imagery of various functions on Chu's LINE

Imagery Function	Policy	Character	Total
Agenda Setting	3 (21.40%)	0 (0.00%)	3 (7.50%)
Emotion	2 (14.30%)	5 (19.20%)	7 (17.50%)
Image Building	8 (57.10%)	16 (61.50%)	24 (60.00%)
Identification	0 (0.00%)	2 (7.70%)	2 (5.00%)
Societal Symbol	1 (7.10%)	1 (3.8%)	2 (5.00%)
Ambiguity	0 (0.00%)	2 (7.70%)	2 (5.00%)
Total	14(100%)	26(100%)	40(100%)

RQ 4: How do the candidates present themselves with text and visual symbols on LINE?

For both policy and character text, an emotional symbol was mostly utilized by Tsai. Chou stressed a visual image with image building. (Table 3 and Table 4)

RQ 5: What were the responses by 'like' and 'share' to the messages on the candidate's official LINE?

Table 5 demonstrated that Tsai managed her LINE more successful than the other candidate because Tsai's message achieved a much larger total amount of 'like' and 'share', and the maximum number of 'like' and 'share' were much higher.

Table 5. Statistics of Like and Share

	Total	Min	Max	Average	SD
Like					
Tsai	55,719	915	2,758	1466.29	383.34
Chou	13,583	168	456	301.84	73.32
Share					
Tsai	17,140	57	2,294	451.05	458.27
Chou	3,199	7	1,723	71.09	253.07

5. Conclusion

With vigorous development of information communication, network technology and smart mobile devices, development of mobile App is overwhelming. Currently, the popular APP in the world includes WhatsApp, WeChat, Google Search, LINE, etc. Global users of LINE in 2016 have broken through one billion.^[10] In Taiwan, LINE users reached seventeen million which is more than half of population. Due to the popularity, LINE was applied in the 2016 Taiwanese presidential election. App election is going to be a trend and merits scholarly attention. This research explores the LINE campaigning by analyzing how the presidential candidates present themselves and the responses by like and share.

In this research, eighty three messages were collected. Thirty-eight posts were collected from Tsai's page and forty five posts were from Chou's page. Most messages were structured by text with a visual symbol. Three messages were imagery only by Tsai and five were text only by Chu. Tsai emphasized policy over character, while Chu emphasized character over policy. It revealed their strategy inclined to reverse gender stereotypes. Both candidates stressed the function of acclaiming. It was similar to the literature of political advertising that have concluded that acclaiming is the most common function of campaign discourse.^[11] Both candidates' imagery contained a much higher proportion of image building and emotional function. With a text on both policy and character topic, visual symbols with an emotional function were utilized the most by Tsai. Chu use visual symbols of image building the most. Obviously, the candidates did not fully employ imagery function and that is probably because LINE is still new to the campaigning. Tsai's message achieved the largest total amount of 'like' and 'share'. Future study may use content analysis to further explore the factors influencing the response of like and share.

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