“Trust me, I am Authentic!”
Mediated Authenticity in Election Campaigns

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Studies of Authenticity

✓ Philosophy
✓ Phycology
✓ Sociology
✓ Art history
✓ Tourism studies
✓ Music studies
✓ Anthropology
Mediated Authenticity

“Authenticity in the context of the media is a communicative process. The degree of authenticity depends on symbolic negotiations between the participants in the communication”.
The paradox:

“although we base most of our knowledge about the world on mediated representations of reality, we are aware that the media are constructed, manipulated, and even faked”

UGC as the ‘authentic’ content?

- New media (radio, local tv, internet, blogs and social media) have repeatedly been expected to be more participatory.

- The promises of ‘new media’ to be more authentic, true, genuine, and less controlled by ‘cynical media owners’.

- Authenticity puzzles – requires a new type of media literacy to decode, and interpret media content as real/fake.
The Authenticity Contract

- Compensates for the void between the sender and the receivers.
- Guarded by codes of ethics, media law, regulators + best practice.
- Based on an irrationality: ‘suspension of disbelief’, we want to believe.
Authenticity Scandals

- When the agreement collapses; contract is broken.
- Miscommunication; deceptions beyond the accepted level.
- Miscalculated (mass) audiences ‘media literacy’
Authenticity as Political Marketing

- Marketing is about adding a symbolic value to a product.
- Brands try to behave like people. Candidates try to behave like brands. Both: construct authenticity to seem ‘real’.
- Before the latter half of the 20th century, the question of whether a candidate was ‘authentic’ was rarely raised.

(source: Hall Jamieson & Waldman 2004)
7 Strategies to Construct Authenticity

1. Predictability
2. Spontaneity
3. Intimacy
4. Confessions
5. Ordinariness
6. Amateurism
7. Imperfection
I. Predictability

- Repeating arguments: Bush – ‘Mr. Consistency’
- Consistent views: Sanders – ‘constant warrior’
- Breaking the rules: Trump – ‘true to himself’
3. Intimacy
2. Spontaneity

- Unscripted or unplanned (errors, speaking without teleprompter)
- Uncontrolled emotions (anger, tears, insults)
- Personal autonomy and breaking social norms (‘a true inner self’)
4. Confessions

- Stories about childhood, poor background (autobiographies)
- Confessing to rumors can build an image as authentic (secrets)
- Tell parts of the story, but adjust major parts (half-truths)
5. Ordinariness

- Everyday people
- Anti-elitist
- Average lifestyle
Negotiating Ordinariness

Hillary Clinton
@HillaryClinton

Pausing backstage in Cedar Rapids, Iowa to capture the moment.
9:29 PM - 31 Jan 2016
1,227 3,712

TankDatingSimulator
@grahamvsworld

look everyone, they're human just like you and not at all super rich servants of wall street
twitter.com/HillaryClinton...
9:43 PM - 31 Jan 2016
7 6

At test Zen
For 1 mnd siden
I will vote for my dog’s dung before the fraudster Hillary gets a vote from me!
Svar 23

Chuck Ross
@ChuckRossDC

Looks very natural. twitter.com/HillaryClinton...
10:07 PM - 31 Jan 2016
2 5
6. Amateurism

- Professional are regarded as cynical and calculated
- Amateurs are regarded as genuine & ‘loving what they do’
- The outsider image – promises a degree of authenticity
7. Imperfection

- Display selected weaknesses / imperfections.
- Makes the politician seem authentic.
- The imperfections might be real or staged.
The ‘authenticity contract’ is renegotiated with every new media technology.

Intimacy at a distance: New media technologies represent new opportunities for candidates to create a shared experience and a sense of togetherness.

Franklin D Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats: “I never saw him—but I knew him. Can you have forgotten how, with his voice, he came into our house, the President of these United States, calling us friends…?” (quoted listener Carl Carmer, April 14, 1945)
Cultural perspective
Implications for election campaigns

- Authentic politicians – a contradictory normative ideal.
- Being ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ – a required qualification.
- Celebrity coverage – personalized election campaigns.
Thank you!

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“Sincerity - if you can fake that, you've got it made” (George Burns)