

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Comparative Study of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication styles of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris in the US Presidential Debate 2024

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to find out the differences in verbal and non-verbal communication of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris in US presidential debate. The study employs qualitative approach to find out the differences in the use of rhetorical strategies by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. For the analysis of non-verbal communication, the multimodal framework has been applied to find out the differences in non-verbal communication of both candidates. Moreover, the researcher employs Ekman's theory of FACS and Birdwhistell's Kinesics to categorize facial expressions and interpret gestures. The sample of this study is the US 2024 Presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. The data is collected from available televised debate on YouTube channel named as 'The Wall Street Journal'. The findings show that Kamala uses pathos abundantly. Trump is more likely to use hyperbole. Other rhetorical strategies used by both candidates include ethos, logos, parallelism, repetition and use of adjectives. The analysis of non-verbal communication reveals that Kamala displays expressive facial expressions while Trump is more likely to show serious and less expressive facial expressions. It is concluded from the analysis that Trump uses exaggeration (hyperbole) as rhetorical strategy while kamala makes use of emotional appeal (pathos) as a rhetorical strategy more throughout the debate. Kamala is emotional and feminine; Trump is aggressive and masculine. Their non-verbal communicative patterns display gender differences. The limitation of the study is its small sample of comparing the verbal and non-verbal communication styles of only one male and female politician.

Keywords: Verbal Communication, Non-verbal Communication, US Presidential Debate, Rhetorical Strategies

Introduction

Televised political debates are potent medium used by politicians to express their political goals, agenda, ideology and policies. According to Kunde (2017), debates are effective tools employed during elections with broad effects. They serve to persuade the voters and give them opportunity to think about who they should vote for and why. Moreover, the voters also get a chance to know the leadership qualities of their candidates and how they can bear pressure (Stewart et al., 2017). In political debates, the candidates showcase their leadership qualities. They try their best abilities to challenge the opponent's skills and qualifications to win voters' support (Benoit, 2014). They defend and prove themselves as the best candidate to be chosen by the masses in the elections. Language's role in the dissemination of ideologies is significant (Akram et al. 2025; Irshad & Yasmin, 2023). Communication style of the candidates plays a very crucial role in shaping the voters' perception. It helps the candidates to express their ideas, vision and plans effectively to the voters. They make arguments and also rebut the claims of their opponent to make their public image clean. The rhetorical strategies, tone, verbal and non-verbal cues are of significant importance in political discourse (Amin & Yasmin, 2025; Saleem et al. 2021). As soon as the elections are announced, politicians give fiery

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speeches in large rallies and stir people's emotions by powerful rhetoric. The role of rhetoric is very powerful in political debates. Persuasion in politics is based on three things: ethos, pathos and logos (Ahmed et al. 2025; Cockcroft & Cockcroft, 1992). Political debates are held which decide, to a large extent, the fate of the candidates in the coming elections. They influence the elections in positive or negative way. 2024 was the year of elections as there were elections in almost 25 countries (John & Sen, 2024).

The most influential elections which actually decide the fate of the world were US 2024 elections. In 2024 US elections, Donald Trump from the Republican party and Kamala Harris from Democratic party were the candidates in the race to the White House. Both of them participated in the 2024 US Presidential debate held on September 10, 2024, and openly talked about their plan and vision for the next four years. The first debate of this election was in June between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. However, Joe Biden stepped down from his position later and Kamala Harris was nominated as a candidate for President from the Democratic party. According to Mackinney and Carlin (2004, as cited in Maierová, 2024), the history of Presidential debate dates back to 1960 when first Presidential debate was held between J. F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon on September 26, 1960. Since then, it has become a crucial part of the US elections. The 2024 Presidential debate was not Donald Trump's first debate as he has taken part in Presidential debate in 2016 against Hillary Clinton and in 2020 against Joe Biden. Kamala Harris on the other hand took part in Presidential debate for the first time ever. She was the second female candidate of President of USA after Hillary Clinton in the history of US elections. According to Jennings et al. (2018), political debates provide candidates with the platform where they can interact with each other directly and offers comparison between them. The objective of this study is to compare the communication styles of both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris in 2024 Presidential debate. Moreover, the present study is also interested in comparing the non-verbal communication of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris.

The significance of present study is that it studies a recent phenomenon. The previous study on this topic deals with the linguistic analysis of Trump and Harris Presidential debate and focuses on analyzing sentence length, word frequency and the use of rhetorical devices like metaphors and hyperbole. The present study fills the gap of the previous study by focusing on non-verbal communication along with verbal communication of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. The delimitations of the study are that it only focuses on the verbal and non-verbal communication. It analyzes the rhetorical strategies and non-verbal communication. The future researcher can analyze the Presidential debate by applying Difference theory by Deborah Tannen.

Research Questions

The present study addressed the issue through the following research questions:

1. How do Donald Trump and Kamala Harris use rhetorical strategies differently in the 2024 Presidential debate?
2. What are the differences in non-verbal communication between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris?

Review of Literature

The existing studies on gender and political discourse focus on how men and women differ in the use of rhetoric and communication styles during political debates.

Gender and Political Debates

In US political history, Hillary Clinton was the first female ever to get nomination for President against Donald Trump in 2016 elections. The introduction of Hillary Clinton as a candidate for President also introduced gender in politics of USA. The Presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in 2016 was the first example of mixed-gender US Presidential debate (Grebelsky-Lichtman & Katz, 2019). There is an increase in the number of female politicians in the current decade who are on important positions in countries like USA, Germany, Britain, France, South Africa, Cuba, Finland, and Argentina (Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2016).

According to Schneider (2014), there is a growing interest in gender and political communication in the recent years. The communicative patterns of male and female candidates are analysed to know how they use different communicative structures in political debates. Moreover, it is also analysed how gender of the candidates contributes to their distinct communicative styles in political debates. According to Lawless (2009), gender communicative pattern plays an imperative role in the progress and reception of women in politics. Moreover, it also affects the voting behaviour and political success (Dolan, 2014).

Rhetorical Strategies in Political Communication

Aristotle defines rhetoric as 'the art of persuading people'. Rhetoric and persuasive discourse are applied in three fields i.e., politics, law and public speeches (Partington, 2010, as cited in Kurnianingsih, 2017). Rhetorical strategies and devices are commonly used in politics as an effective tool to persuade audience and influence them (Irshad & Yasmin, 2025). The politicians who address large public rallies, argue in televised political debates and deliver political speeches employ rhetorical strategies for the sake of achieving a political goal, to shape public opinions and to make people act and think the way they want. Examples of rhetorical devices and strategies include repetition, parallelism, hyperbole, anecdote, ethos, pathos and logos etc. In his seminal work *Rhetoric* (367-322 BCE), Aristotle introduced rhetorical strategies of ethos, pathos and logos. These are modes of persuasion that are employed by the speakers for effective communication.

Pathos is one of the three modes of persuasion given by Aristotle. It is a way to persuade the audience by appealing to their emotions. Another mode of persuasion is ethos. According to Corbett (1965), Aristotle considered ethos as the most effective appeal. Ethos which is a Greek term means 'character' can be defined as the speaker's credibility and trust. The speaker employs it when he has to demonstrate him as the most credible person for something. The appeal and personality of the speaker is very important as it marks the first impression of him (Griffin, 2011). The last mode of persuasion is logos, a rhetorical device that uses logic and evidence to support a claim. It involves the use of statistics, facts and figures and data either to support or reject an argument. According to Aristotle (1954), logos means to appeal the audience through logic, facts and evidence. The speakers try to gain audience interests through logical reasoning.

Other kinds of rhetorical strategies include parallelism which is the use of similar grammatical structure or pattern within the sentences. According to Leech and Short (2007), in parallelism the words, phrases and sentences are repeated structurally. It helps to put emphasis and remember things. Repetition refers to repeating a word, phrases or sentence multiple times throughout a speech. The politicians reinforce their ideas and arguments through repetition.

An anecdote is a short and personal story told by the speaker to audience that he thinks is significant to the topic they are talking about. Politicians employed this rhetorical strategy to make their arguments relatable and persuasive. Corbett (1965) defines hyperbole as a rhetorical strategy which involves the exaggeration of things for the sake of emphasis and to create effect.

Impact of Non-Verbal Communication in Politics

In political debates, non-verbal communication like facial expressions, eye contact, hand gestures and tone hold a significant importance in shaping public perceptions. Mehrabian's (1971) study underscored the importance of non-verbal communication in leadership. He stated that 90% of the messages that are conveyed by the speaker are non-verbal. The politicians consciously and unconsciously display certain gestures and facial expression that reveal, to a large extent, their character and personality. A study by Seiter and Weger (2020) comprehensively gave an account of how politicians strategically use non-verbal signals in political debates to influence the views of audience. This study incorporates researches from different fields like psychology, political science and communication studies to evaluate how non-verbal communication affects political results and public perception. A voter is more likely to impress by a candidate

who displays confident body language and facial expressions. Sullivan and Masters (1988) conducted research on US candidates that how they employed emotional facial expressions to appeal to voters in political debates and campaigns. Their study revealed that presidential candidates who exhibit positive facial expressions were perceived as skilled, reliable and trustworthy. This increased the support of voters in their favour. On the other hand, candidates who displayed negative facial expressions such as anger did not get any favour. This study underscored the key role of non-verbal communication such as emotional facial expressions in influencing the voters' perceptions. Mehrabian (1972) studied the importance of verbal vs. non-verbal gestures in the expressions of emotions and attitudes. The findings of the study revealed that 93% of the impact in communication is created by non-verbal communication comprising 55% body language and 38% tone while 7% by verbal communication such as words. The existing studies reveal that non-verbal communication with verbal communication plays important role in shaping public opinions.

In the recent years, a lot of studies have been conducted in politics from gender perspectives. The researchers have been interested in analyzing verbal and non-verbal communication patterns of male and female candidates. Different studies have analyzed the political debates of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in 2016 from different perspectives to find out the differences in their communication patterns. Grebelsky-Lichtman and Katz (2019) conducted research on mixed-gender televised debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in 2016 US presidential campaign. The study employed theoretical and analytical framework to examine the verbal and non-verbal communication patterns. The findings of the study showed that Trump used masculine-communicative patterns and Hillary used feminine-communicative patterns in the 2016 presidential debate. A critical discourse analysis of Presidential debates between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton was conducted by Al- Tarawneh (2018). The analysis of the debates showed that both candidates took different ideological stands, displayed different power distribution and employed varying persuasion tactics to deal with issues like immigration, human rights and economy. Another study which conducted critical discourse analysis of three debates between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton was by El-Hawary et al. (2020). The aim of the study was to analyse the lexical choices of both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton to unearth their covert ideologies on the issues that were discussed in the debate. The Culpepers's (2011) model was used to uncover the aggression and impoliteness in their language use. Kurnianingsih's (2017) conducted a discursive stylistic study of the second presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The focus of the study was to find out the rhetorical devices and discursive strategies used by them. The findings of the study revealed that both candidates used all types of rhetorical devices (parallelism, simile, hyperbole, synecdoche, metaphor, irony and allusion) and in modes of persuasion pathos and hyperbole remained dominant in both candidates. A similar study which examined the rhetoric and style of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton was by Savoy (2017). The researcher analysed tv debates and interviews of both candidates. The findings unearthed that the most frequent lemma was the use of pronoun 'we' in the speeches of both candidates. Trump's communication style was simple and direct with short sentences and used verb phrases and pronouns on the other hand, Clinton's communication style was descriptive as she used more nouns and prepositions. Moreover, the word list indicated that Clinton used cognitive words and Trump's verbiage consisted mostly negative emotions and exclusive terms.

Maierová (2024) conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris presidential debate in 2024 US elections to find out the linguistic features and rhetorical strategies used by both candidates. The findings revealed significant differences in the communication styles of both candidates in terms of length of sentences and frequency of words. In addition to it, both candidates used metaphors, hyperbole and three-part lists for persuasion. McGuire et al. (2017) analysed 80 speeches of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The study aimed to evaluate the use of first-person singular pronoun, swear words, anger and cognitive language etc. by both candidates. The findings showed that the language choices and speech patterns of both candidates were influenced by stereotypical beliefs about the role and inherent qualities of character male and female. Mahartika and Hanafiah's (2019) study aimed to analyse the ways Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton delivered their speeches and find out the characteristics of male and female's political

speech. The study employed descriptive qualitative research to examine utterances of male and female politicians from the presidential announcement speech. The results employed that both male and female politicians employed report and rapport talk in their speeches. Male politicians were likely to use report talk than rapport talk and used rapport talk to establish relationship and gain support. On the other hand, female politicians used both report talk, and rapport talk equally.

A case study was conducted on Trump and Clinton by Assiaka and Donald (2021) to investigate the use of hedges in the presidential debates and speeches in 2016 presidential election. The study compared the gender differences in the use of hedges and then investigated the pragmatic functions that they performed. The findings revealed that both candidates employed these devices to save their public images. Donald Trump used the modal verbs 'will' and 'can' with frequencies of 63.52% and 36.47% and Hillary Clinton using them with frequencies of 51.80% and 48.19% respectively. Moreover, they both employed hedges to emphasize propositions, show uncertainty and express possibility. Aleksandra's (2020) thesis explored the speeches of Trump and Clinton during the presidential campaign to reflect on different uses of metaphors and genderlect. The study employed Cognitive Metaphor Theory and Deborah Tannen's approach to analyse the speeches of both candidates. The findings revealed that the 'war' and 'container' metaphors were used related to terrorism and immigration. On the other hand, neither of the candidate displayed the typical features of genderlect.

Research Methodology

This study deals with naturally occurring data so keeping in mind the nature of the study, the researcher employed qualitative approach to find out the differences in the use of rhetorical strategies by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research tends to explore how people and groups interpret issues that are social through natural methods of data collection, flexible means of inquiry and through inductive analysis which emphasize on the individual perspective and complexity. The research paradigm of this study is social constructivism. Social constructivism paradigm deals with how language is used to construct reality socially and how knowledge is created through social interactions. The sample of this study is the US 2024 Presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. The data was collected from available televised debate on YouTube channel named as 'The Wall Street Journal'. The social constructivism paradigm uses methods like discourse analysis to analyse the discourses so the discourse analysis of the debate was conducted to identify the differences in the use of rhetorical strategies by both candidates in the debate. For the analysis of non-verbal communication, the multimodal framework has been applied to find out the differences in non-verbal communication of both candidates. Moreover, the researcher employed Ekman's theory of Facial Action Coding System (FACS) and Birdwhistell's Kinesics to categorize facial expressions and interpret gestures.

Analysis and Results

In the US 2024 presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, both candidates employed rhetorical strategies for effective argumentation and communication. The data analysis focuses on finding the differences in the use of rhetorical strategies by Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. The non-verbal communication will also be analysed by using Ekman's theory of FACS and Birdwhistell's Kinesics.

Rhetorical Strategies

Pathos: Emotional appeals in debate

Politicians use it to evoke emotions in public so that they can persuade them.

Kamal Harris: I think..... certain freedoms.....the freedom to make decisions.....should not be made by the government.

Her phrase *'freedom to make decisions about one's own body'* shows how she taps into emotional weight of reproductive rights. Reproductive rights is an issue that echoes majority of American women's concern. Her phrasing, including *'certain freedoms'* and *'should not be made by the government'*, evokes fear regarding governmental overreach into private lives, thereby bolstering the argument for safeguarding individual liberties. The use of *'the American people believe'* fortifies the emotional impact by invoking collective identity; the statement thereby transcends a solely personal viewpoint, presenting a shared value facing endangerment.

Kamala Harris: We see in each other a friend.....a neighbour.....invest in the aspirations, ambitions, dreams of the American people...regardless of people's colour.... language.... speaks.... same dreams.... want a president who invest in those not in hate division.

In this excerpt from the debate, Kamala makes an emotional appeal with the Black people of America. The use of positive terms like *'friend'* and *'neighbour'* and pronoun *'we'* six times gives glimpses of her believe in inclusivity beyond any race, colour and language. Moreover, repetition of statements *'the aspirations and the ambitions and the dreams of the American people'* and *'we all have the same dreams and aspirations'* shows that *'the American people'* share common goals including not wanting a President who segregates them on the basis of racial identities.

Kamala Harris: The president.... invited the Taliban to Camp David a place of stored significance for us...where we honour the importance of American diplomacy...invite and receive respected world leaders.....consistently disparaged and demeaned.... military fallen soldiers.

Kamala Harris used *'the Taliban'* which refer to all Taliban who are considered terrorists by Americans. She calls Camp David *'a place of stored significance'* where only respected people are allowed to be invited, not the terrorists. She invokes the emotions of the American people by highlighting the sanctity of Camp David. Her phrase *'disparaged and demeaned members of our military fallen soldiers'* reflect that inviting *'the Taliban'* in Camp David means to belittle the soldiers of military who actually sacrificed their lives fighting against these Taliban.

Kamala Harris: When I am president, we will do that....access to health care should be a right and not just a privilege.....the plan.....strengthen the affordable care act, not get rid of it.

In the above excerpt, Kamala makes an emotional appeal with the middle and lower classes of America. The use of pronoun *'we'* represents the middle and working class of America which Kamala Harris also belongs to. She highlights the importance of affordable health care by calling it a *'right'* not a *'privilege'*. In addition to this, the use of modal verb *'should'* embolden the need to have access to affordable health care to every class.

Ethos: Credibility and Character in Rhetorical Strategy

In their presidential debate, both candidates made use of ethos in their rhetoric.

Kamala Harris: I was raised as a middle-class kid....am the only person on this stage who has a plan...lifting up the middle class... believe in the ambitions, the aspirations and the dreams.... plan to build.... opportunity economy.

In this above excerpt of Kamala Harris, she builds her reputation as a credible person by establishing a connection with middle class people of America. She tries to persuade the audience by saying *'she was raised as a middle-class kid'* therefore, she is fully aware of the struggles, dreams and interests of the middle class and working class of America. She employed ethos to show her credibility to represent the middle class of America. Moreover, the use of pronoun *'I'* many times reflects her self-confidence as a trustworthy and reliable person who has the ability to do something for the middle-class people.

Donald Trump: I created one of the greatest economies in the history of our country. I'll do it again and even better.

In this excerpt, Donald Trump builds his credibility as sole creator of the greatest economy. The use of superlative degree 'greatest' amplify his achievement. The phrase 'in the history of our country' marks his unprecedented achievement that no other president has achieved. Furthermore, the phrase 'again and even better' reinforces Trump's narrative of 'Make America Great Again'.

Logos: Logical Argumentation and Evidence Use

Donald Trump and Kamala Harris used logos to support their arguments. Some excerpts of them are following:

Kamala Harris: what Goldman Sachs....said.... Donald Trump's plan....make the economy worse mine would strengthen.... Wharton School...Donald Trump's plan.... explode the deficit, 16 Nobel laureates...described his economic plan.... would increase inflation.

Using logos, Kamala tries to strengthen her arguments against Trump's economic plan. She gives references of economic and finance experts like Goldman Sachs, Wharton School and 16 Nobel Laureates that how they all have prophesised that Trump's economic plan will completely destroy the economy. She didn't criticize Trump's economic plan based on her personal view but mentioning the point of views of experts she has actually conveyed the idea that she is not the only one who finds Trump's economic plan a failure, but the experts also feel the same. In this way, she has employed logos to make her argument strong.

Kamala Harris: When Donald Trump was president, 60 times he tried to get rid of the Affordable Care Act 60 times

Kamala repeats the figure '60 times' to emphasize on the fact that how Donald Trump during his presidency made an attempt to undo the affordable care act which ensures the access of affordable health care to all people. The figure '60 times' provides the statistics of Trump's action also shows his unfailing determination to discard the act.

Donald Trump: I went to the Wharton School of finance.... top professors think my plan is a brilliant.... great plan.... bring up our worth our value as a country.

Like Kamala, Trump also gives references of 'Wharton School of finance' and 'top professors' to help strengthen his argument on his economic plan. Trump uses phrases like 'brilliant plan', 'great plan' which show his confidence on his plan that it ensures bringing worth and value to the country.

Donald Trump: I got almost 75 million votes the most votes any.....president has ever gotten.....I got 63 which was what I got in 2016.

Donald Trump uses facts and figures '75 million' to show his achievement of getting the most votes as a president which no president has ever gotten. By using logos, he is actually trying to establishing his worth and value in the eyes of Americans who gave him the most votes in 2016 and may be will do it again in this election as well.

Parallelism: Structural Rhetoric in Speech

Both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris employed parallelism as a rhetorical strategy in their debate.

Kamala Harris: Donald Trump left us.... left us the worst unemployment.... left us the worst Public Health epidemic....left us the worst attack on our democracy since the Civil War

Kamala uses the phrase 'Donald Trump left us' four times for the sake of emphasis. She is highlighting the legacy of Donald Trump as a president. Moreover, the phrases 'worst unemployment', 'worst Public Health

epidemic’ and ‘worst attack on democracy’ has been used to show him as an incompetent person who has already done disasters.

Kamala Harris:place in our campaign for you to stand for country, to stand for our democracy to stand for rule of law....

In this excerpt, Kamala employs parallelism to emphasize on the idea of standing up for the country, democracy and rule of the law. Her phrase *‘a place in our campaign’* indicates that she is welcoming the Americans to play their part in strengthening the country. It is also creating a sense of belonging to the party that it is only focused on building the nation.

Donald Trump: We have millions of people pouring into our country.....What’s happening you see, what is happening with towns, ...taking over the towns.....taking over buildings

Donald Trump uses parallelism to reinforce his argument on government’s failure in controlling immigrants. *‘What is happening you see’* addresses the audience to perceive the possible threat. The use of pronoun *‘they’* refers to illegal immigrants who has been framed as a threat to security. The phrases, *‘they are taking over the towns’*, *‘they are taking over the building’* evokes fear of invasion and creates a sense of urgency to stop them.

Donald Trump: people give me credit for rebuilding the military they give me credit for a lot of things.

In this excerpt, Donald Trump is building his credibility through parallelism. The repetition of phrases *‘people give me credit’*, *‘they give me credit’* depicts acknowledgement of his achievements as President. *‘Rebuilding the military’* suggests that the military was in decline thus frames himself as constructor of military and strengthening national security.

Repetition: Reinforcing Rhetoric through Repetition

Donald Trump: She doesn't have a plan take a look at her plan she doesn't have a plan

Donald Trump repeated the sentence *‘she doesn’t have a plan’* two times for the sake of emphasis. He used it to prove her unfit and unreliable to lead a country like America. Moreover, the phrase, *‘take a look at her plan’* invites criticism to Kamala’s plan that her plan is that she doesn’t have a plan.

Donald Trump: Russia, Russia, Russia

Here, Trump repeats *‘Russia’* three times to put emphasis on how the opponents are obsessed with Russia that it would reach the capital of Ukraine and is posing threat to Europe as well. It shows Trump’s frustration over opponent’s overconcerns on Russia. The repetition also mocks opponents’ allegation considering them exaggerated.

Kamala Harris: ...you're going to hear.... the same old tired Playbook, a bunch of Lies, grievances...name calling.... you're going to hear....

In this excerpt, Kamala repeated the phrase *‘you are going to hear’* with an explicit motive to highlight the fact that Trump’s discourse is just based on lies and fabricated stories. Directly addressing the audience by using pronoun *‘You’* twice, she is shaping public perception through lexical choices. Moreover, her phrase *‘same old tired Playbook’* is framing opponent Donald Trump as an unreliable candidate thus, undermining his credibility.

Kamala Harris: I believe in the ambitions, the aspirations and the dreams of the American people, the aspirations and the hopes of the American people....

Kamala has repeated the words *‘ambitions, aspiration and dreams’* many times during the debate. The words *‘aspirations’*, *‘hopes’* reinforce a positive and optimistic attitude towards progress. Moreover, the repetition shows that how much she invests on the idea of materializing the ambitions and dreams of the American people.

Hyperbole: Exaggeration in Rhetoric

Donald Trump: millions and millions of people that are pouring into our country

In this excerpt, Trump has used numerical exaggeration as a rhetorical strategy to highlight his stance on immigration as a crisis that need immediate attention of the government. He uses words ‘*millions and millions*’ not the exact figures to create a strong effect to address immigration as urgency.

Donald Trump: We...inflation.....very few people....seen before probably.... worst in... nation's history

In this excerpt, Trump exaggerates the situation of inflation. The phrase ‘*very few people have ever seen before*’ shows inflation as an unprecedented phenomenon. The word ‘*probably*’ depicts uncertainty of the fact but still this statement is exaggerating. The phrase ‘*worst in our nation's history*’ criticizes the government's economic policies and also suggests the severity of inflation which was never seen before.

Kamala Haris: But understand if Donald Trump....re-elected.....sign a National Abortion Ban.....there would be a National Abortion.....monitoring pregnancies.....miscarriages

Kamala employs hyperbole to exaggerate her hypothetical claim on National Abortion ban. Moreover, it put emphasis on the possible consequences of Trump's policies. The phrase ‘*he will sign a National Abortion ban*’ shows certainty of Trump's plan despite the fact there is no plan of surveillance. The phrase ‘*monitoring your pregnancies your miscarriages*’ frames the issue as a matter of concern over governmental overreach into private lives of people if Donald Trump is elected again.

Anecdote

Kamala Harris:....having a friend....in high school.... sexually assaulted by her stepfather.....protecting women and children from violent crime....a value....grounded.....standing up for.....vulnerable

In this excerpt, Kamala shares an incident of a friend of her who was victim of sexual assault by her step father. The motive behind referring to this incident is to put emphasis on the fact that women are not safe. Reminiscing the personal experience of her friend, she tries to reinforce her argument regarding the protection of women as well as children. Furthermore, the phrases ‘*importance of standing up*’ and ‘*vulnerable*’ show her deep concern and affection for those who can't protect themselves.

Kamala Harris: my passion.....small businesses....my mother raised my sister and me.....a woman who helped raise us.....our second mother.....small business owner....love...small businesses.

Kamala underscores the importance of ‘*small businesses*’ and repeats it two times in the above excerpt. The phrases ‘*my passion*’ and ‘*I love*’ show her emotional connection with small businesses which are ingrained in her because of her childhood experiences. The advocacy of small businesses as the backbone of middle-class families through personal experience transcends from personal to broader social concern. Moreover, the phrases ‘*our second mother*’ depicts motherly connection beyond biological bonds.

Donald Trump: In Springfield they're eating the dogs.....they're eating the cats they're eating they're eating the pets of the people.....what's happening in.....country.

Donald Trump shares an anecdote regarding people eating pets of people. The phrases ‘*they are eating the dogs*’, ‘*eating the pets*’ show extreme crisis to food access. This anecdote strengthens his argument of America's worst economic condition under Biden's administration. ‘*This is what's happening in our country*’ depicts unrealistic condition of the country which frames the opponent in bad light.

Use of Adjectives

Donald Trump and Kamala Harris used almost same kind of adjectives in their debate. The adjective ‘*worst*’ was the most used adjective by both candidates. Additionally, they both used positive adjectives when they

talked about their government, economy and plans and negative adjectives for the opponent. Donald Trump used adjectives like worst, terrible, weak and horrible the most when he talked about Biden's government, his economy and actions. On the other hand, he used adjectives like great, better and strong to refer to his economy and future plans.

Donald Trump: She is **worse** than Biden, she is a **horrible** negotiator, Trump economy was **great** their economy was **terrible**, it is going to be **bigger**, **better** and **stronger**

Kamala Harris also used same adjectives as used by Donald Trump like worst, weak and terrible and used the adjective strong to talk about her economic plan for the next four years.

Kamala Harris: Trump is **weak** and **wrong**, it was a **weak terrible** deal, **worst** unemployment, **worst** public health, **worst** attack on our democracy, Trump's plan would make economy **worse** mine would strengthen it.

Non-Verbal communication

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions include raising eyebrows, smiling and rolling eyes etc. In the political debate, both candidates displayed different facial expressions. Kamala Harris was more likely to smile and sometimes laugh during the whole debate as compared to Donald Trump. She smiled with her eyebrows raised in response to Trump's arguments most of the times. In the two pictures of figure 1.1, Kamala gives a broad smile and displays raised cheeks. A broad smile with raised cheeks shows happiness and friendliness (Ekman, 2003). Donald Trump, on the other hand, kept a straight face and occasionally smiled and raised his eye brows during the whole debate. According to Ekman (1972), raising eyebrows indicates surprise, disbelief or uncertainty at the statement of opponent.

Figure 1

Photos of Kamala Harris Smiling and Laughing During the Debate



Figure 2

Photo of Donald Trump Smiling and Raising Eyebrows During the Debate



The other finding is rolling of eyes. Kamala rolled her eyes many times often with a smirk. She showed disagreement whenever she rolled her eyes in the debate. According to Birdwhistell (1970), rolling eyes shows frustration, sarcasm or disagreement on the opponent’s opinion. In contrary, Donald Trump didn’t roll his eyes.

Figure 3

Photos of Kamala Harris Rolling Her Eyes



Hand Gestures

Metaphoric gestures and deictic gestures are two types of hand gestures. Metaphoric gestures refer to the spreading of hands to talk about a broad concept. Deictic gestures are used to point at objects and persons etc. Kamala Harris used metaphoric gestures almost all the time during the debate and deictic gestures occasionally. Donald Trump used deictic gestures to point at Kamala Harris. According to Birdwhistell (1970), open palms represent confidence and honesty while pointing fingers indicates authority and also shows aggression.

Figure 4

Photos of Kamala Harris Using Metaphorical and Deictic Gestures



Figure 5

Photos of Donald Trump Using Deictic Gestures



Tone

In political debates, tone refers to the speaker's emotional attitude. Donald Trump's tone was aggressive, serious and firm as compared to Kamala Harris; in contrast to this, Kamala's tone was less aggressive and to a great extent was emotional and energetic. While talking, the intonation of Trump rose many times while Kamala's intonation was neutral even when she was aggressive during the debate. The pictures of figure 1.6 show aggressive tone of Donald Trump as while speaking his intonation raised and his tone became aggressive; on the other hand, Kamala's intonation was neutral during the debate. Sometimes, her tone was aggressive but her emotional tone remained dominated throughout the debate.

Figure 6

Photos of Kamala Harris in Emotional Mode and Donald Trump in Aggressive Mode

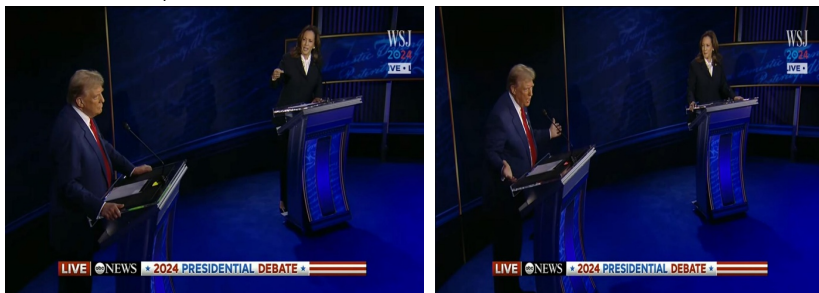


Eye Contact

Kamala Harris maintained eye contact with Donald Trump and hosts throughout the debate. She made eye contact with Donald Trump when he was talking and also when she had to give response to him. Maintaining direct eye contact reflects confidence (Birdwhistell, 1970). Donald Trump hardly made eye contact with Kamala Harris. He only made eye contact with the hosts of the debates. According to Birdwhistell (1970), avoiding eye contact shows nervousness.

Figure 7

Photo of Donald Trump making eye contact with the moderators and Kamala Harris making eye contact with Donald Trump



Shaking of Head

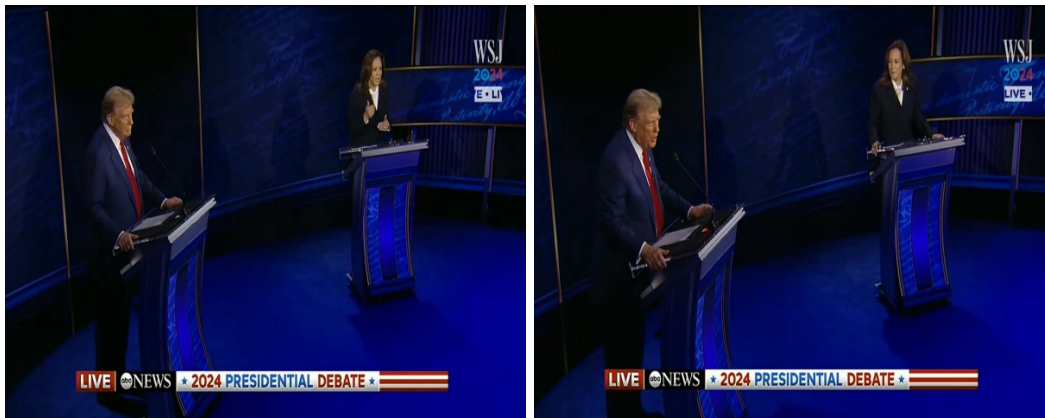
Shaking head is side-to-side motion of head. Both of the candidates shook their heads during the debate. In political debates, politicians shake their heads in disagreement without any verbal interference. According to Birdwhistell (1970), shaking head indicates rejection or disbelief. Kamala was more likely to shake her head with a smile as compared to Trump. In figure 1.3, Kamala Harris was seen shaking her head with rolling eyes and subtle laugh which indicates contempt (Birdwhistell, 1970).

Body Postures

Donald Trump and Kamala Harris stood with upright posture. Neither of them slouched, leaned backward or crossed arms during the debate. In the both pictures of figure 1.8, it can be seen that both are leaning forward which indicates engagement and interest (Birdwhistell, 1970).

Figure 8

Photos of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris Displaying Upright Posture



Discussion

The analysis and findings of the data showed that both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris used rhetorical strategies to persuade the voters. Both of the candidates used some rhetorical strategies more than the other. Kamala used pathos which means she emotionally appealed the audience many times in her speech while Trump was more likely to exaggerate the things. He used hyperbole abundantly during the debate. A study by Kurnianingsih's (2017) also showed that pathos and hyperbole were found in abundant in the second presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Both of them used almost similar adjectives. Non-verbal communication of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris was quite different. Kamala put a smile on her face during the whole debate while Trump kept a straight face. He just smiled occasionally. According to Hall et al. (2000), women are more likely to smile as compared to men. Men display a serious or neutral facial expression. Moreover, Kamala was more likely to make eye contact with Donald Trump and the moderators. Donald Trump only made eye contact with the moderators of the debate. Women are more likely to smile and make eye contact than men (Vacharkulksemsuk et al., 2016, as cited in Wasike, 2019). Kamala rolled her eyes many times in the debate. She also raised eyebrows, sometimes, with a smirk more as compared to Donald Trump. In addition to this, she shook her head in disagreement many times throughout the debate. Women are more likely to express facial expression while men are less likely to display facial expressions (Hall, 1984). Both candidates talked with their hands with expansive postures and maintain upright posture during the whole debate. The tone of Donald Trump was aggressive and accusing while Kamala's emotional tone remained dominated. Grebelsky-Lichtman's (2017) study that is based on gendered communication framework categorizes verbal and non-verbal communication into feminine and masculine styles. This framework shows that smile, making eye contact, expressive faces, emotional references (pathos) and personal examples (anecdote) are examples of feminine communicative styles. On the other hand, accusing speech and angry facial expression are examples of masculine communicative patterns.

Conclusion

The objective of the study was to find out the differences in the use of rhetorical strategies and in non-verbal communication between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris in the US presidential debate. The findings showed that Kamala used pathos abundantly. Trump was more likely to use hyperbole. Other rhetorical strategies used by both candidates included ethos, logos, parallelism, repetition and use of adjectives. Non-verbal communication of both candidates was distinctive. Kamala put smile, raised eyebrows and rolled eyes during the debate. Donald Trump occasionally raised eyebrows with a smile. Moreover, Kamala maintained eye contact with Trump while Trump avoided eye contact with Kamala. Both of them displayed upright posture and shook heads in disagreement. Kamala was more likely to shake her head with a smile. Furthermore, Kamala talked with her hands spread and Trump used pointing finger. It is concluded from the analysis that

Trump used exaggeration (hyperbole) as rhetorical strategy while kamala made use of emotional appeal (pathos) as a rhetorical strategy more throughout the debate. Kamala's speech and tone was emotional most of the times whereas Trump was aggressive in his speech. Kamala displayed feminine communicative patterns while Trump showed masculine communicative patterns. Their non-verbal communicative patterns displayed gender differences. The limitation of the study is its small sample of comparing the verbal and non-verbal communication styles of only one male and female politician. The future researcher can analyse the US presidential debate between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris by applying difference theory of Deborah Tannen.

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