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Digital Cultures of Political Participation: Internet Memes and the Discursive Delegitimization of the 2016 U.S Presidential Candidates

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Abstract
Internet memes are a contemporary phenomenon situated at the nexus of language, society, and digital communication, and represent a relatively new form of participatory culture that can offer certain demographics an opportunity for political expression, engagement and participation which otherwise might not have been accessible. This article adopts a discourse analytical perspective to examine the visual-discursive features of Internet memes in relation to the candidates for the 2016 U.S presidential election – Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Specifically, memes are analyzed in line with Van Leeuwen’s (2007) framework for the analysis of legitimizing discourse in relation to how they de-legitimize. That is, the focus is on how memes attempt to create a negative view of the candidates and reduce their legitimacy as presidential candidates. The analysis reveals that the (de)legitimization strategies of authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoesis are all evident within Internet memes.

Keywords
Delegitimization; Internet memes; political participation; discourse

1. Introduction
The use of various forms of digital communication and in particular social media has grown rapidly to the point that social media has “become one of the most popular Internet services in the world” (Gil de Zúñiga, Jong & Valenzuela, 2012, p. 319), thereby providing an avenue for social and political participation to many who previously may not have found such an avenue either apparent or available. One form of digital communication that falls into this
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