MIRROR OF IDENTITY; POLITICAL PERSONALIZATION OF FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN MASS MEDIA

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Abstract

The development of political communication has brought various interactional communicative strategies among political participants, namely: politicians, journalists and the public. This strategy mainly emerged during the presidential campaign, due to at this time the presidential candidates are competing to win votes. One of the ways to obtain high votes is through political personalization. This identification process is carried out with the help of mass media, which framed the individuality actions of the presidential candidates in various ways. This study analyzes French media framing toward political personalization by Emmanuel Macron (EM) and Marine Le Pen (MLP). Data collection was carried out with the help of NVIVO's linguistic tools to see trend in lexical forms and lingual expressions used by the media and social media. This research is expected to become a discourse analysis research model based on the interactional system between participants in French politics, particularly those related to national identity.

Keywords: *political personalization; presidential campaign; identity construction; individuality action; French politics*

Introduction

Political communication does not only occur in the spatiotemporal space, but also occurs in a symbolic space that involves the roles of all communicational interaction participants, such as: politicians, party sympathizers, public, and media. This interaction requires each participant to play a role in complex situations, either directly or indirectly. In this indirect communication, the media inform the public concerning the arguments presented by politicians. In fact, the journalists' writings are often persuasive in nature which invite public reactions (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Stroud, 2008).

Today, media are considered as the main means of mass communication. The media enable massive information spreading mechanisms and facilitate the construction of social consensus, as well as the reproduction of public discourse at a certain level of interaction. Most of them are positioned in certain social and political spaces. In this situation, media pluralism and freedom of information circulation determine the strategy of discourse construction, it means that the political ideological position of the media affects the result of discourse produced (Han, 2015; Kern, 2015). Therefore, the discourse in the mass media becomes a space for dialogue and opinion between politicians and the public. The media plays the role of a mediator which function is to spread the speech of politicians to the public (Gbadegesin & Onanuga, 2019).

This mechanism also applies in any political situation and event, including the presidential campaign in France in 2017. Two candidates who entered the second round, namely Emmanuel Macron (hereinafter abbreviated as EM) and Marine Le Pen (hereinafter abbreviated as MLP), both use the media as a tool to gain votes. When EM campaigned in Orléans on May 8th 2016, the daily Libération media described EM as having *rêve fou* 'crazy dream' and *ambition démesurée* 'immeasurable ambition' that threatened Francois Hollande (President of France 2016) and Manuel Valls (Raulin, Alemagna, & Rousseau, 2016)(Prime French Minister 2016) (Raulin, Alemagna, & Rousseau, 2016). EM is said to have crazy ambitions due to he is a liberal, who does not follow the right-wing and the left-wing, who carries his political program towards a social

democrat, including: financing refugees, revising employee working hours, and abolishing the wealth tax. On the other hand, the daily Figaro.fr describes MLP as *candidat qui pense le plus au bien commun des Français*: *elle semble très libre d'agir car elle n'est pas liée par différents mouvement ou par le regard des autres, Marine Le Pen est. la personnalité politique la plus compétente aujourd'hui, elle est sincère, cohérente et très bonne oratrice* a 'candidate who think about the common good, free to act, and not tied to the movements or views of others. MLP is the most competent, sincere, consistent political figure and an excellent orator' (Galy-Ramounot, 2017). This article in daily Figaro.fr discussed the opinion of French women regarding MLP when she gave a speech in Marseille on April 19th, 2017. In her speech, MLP presented her campaign program aimed at addressing the problems of unemployment, retirement and terrorism perpetrated by radical Islamists.

From the example above, it can be seen that the mass media are free to frame the image of a presidential candidate in accordance with their respective discourse goals. The framing of the presidential candidate's image by the media is certainly based on discourse narratives created by the presidential candidates themselves. They tell their experiences, stories of their political journey, political programs offered, as well as solutions in facing state problems to the general public. This narrative is created by each candidate to increase their credibility, highlight their abilities and ultimately influence the prospective voters. Therefore, it is as if the candidate's political personalization is an "individual action" that appears in the middle of a "collective action" or "collective event". Likewise, MLP, she appears as a politician who is competent in dealing with terrorist problems, even though terrorism issue is a problem that is raised by all presidential candidates.

The political personalization of presidential candidates emerged in the middle of many new social movements that had group identities, for example: immigrant groups, women, political parties. They are involved in heterogeneous mobilization which ultimately leads to conflict, inequality or justice. These various mobilizations lead to the emergence of expressions of political personalization, marked by the presence of emotional ties between the group and charismatic political leaders or

presidential candidates (Bennett, 2012). The expression of political personalization is developed intensively with the help of the media.

Research on political personalization is also carried out by Holtz-Bacha et al., (2014) which states that personalization takes different forms depending on the characteristics of the media, the country's political system, and the form of campaign for each candidate. Furthermore, Holtz-Bacha et al. (2014) states that the main factors of a driver for personalization are the development of the media industry in the political domain, society modernization and changes in the political system. This research will only limit the political personalization of candidates related to the campaign discourse on national identity. An increase in immigrants, particularly from North Africa, a shift in the concept of secularism, and the threat of terrorists from radical Islamist groups created a sense of *xenophobia*, *islamophobia*, and a crisis of national identity among French society. This matter has made the concept of national identity an interesting issue for debate among presidential candidates, with the aim of gaining votes.

Research Method

This study was analyzed using all media, including newspapers, magazines, and social media, *facebook* and *twitter*. The data limit was simply based on the deadline for publication, which meant that the data was taken a maximum of one week after the president's speech was delivered in public. The data taken were in form of lingual units and lingual expressions which have linguistic meaning related to political personalization. The first step in the research process was data collection. In this step, reading activities were carried out in each media discourse corpus, which aimed to determine the context of the speech and to see the suitability between speech and reality. The second step was to analyze the data by identifying lingual markers that contain elements of political personalization and national identity in the discourse based on the transcripts and capture of media discourses.

The data identification process was carried out in two ways: first, creating a lexical graph containing the lexicon frequencies in each speech discourse using a software called *concordancer* through NVIVO linguistic

tool. From the resulting lexicon table, an analysis table would be created to observe the tendency of elements of discourse in the media, for example: the frequency of occurrence of lexicons, variations in lexicons according to speakers, variations in lexicon according to context, and others. Later, from the analysis table, the lexicon is described with various explanations and interpretations. Second, from the recurring segment module in the lexicon table obtained, speech expressions and communicative strategies used by audiences in the media are analyzed based on variations in lexicons and speech expressions related to political personalization and national identity in their discourse with a discourse analysis approach.

Results and Discussion

Mass media and social media are social in nature due to they create, utilize and sustain social interactions between participants (in this study among presidential candidates, politicians, journalists and public). Interaction in the mass media is able to occur in contexts that are both 'descriptive' and 'ideological'. Participant interaction in a descriptive context will create a 'descriptive discourse', while participants interaction in an ideological context will create a 'reflexive discourse'. Descriptive discourse contains descriptive explanations of certain events. In other words, the media compose their discourse without wanting to convince and persuade readers. In this descriptive discourse, the media produce effects in the 'knowledge realm', that is the media to communicate and to transmit knowledge to readers without giving new thoughts. On the other hand, in a reflexive discourse that lies in an ideological context, the media invites the reader to reflect on the subject that is presented in the discourse. In this reflection process, the media persuade and influence readers to support or not support a presidential candidate. The media have the 'power' to move the reader's thoughts. Therefore, utterance in reflexive discourse has an effect on the 'power realm'. Thus, the interaction between participants in the mass media depends on a discursive context, which mean that the production of journalistic discourse is influenced by the context of events. The media must consider and select a context in accordance with the expected discursive goals.

Regarding these two contexts (descriptive and ideological), it is assumed that they can be used simultaneously in one discourse (used at the same time in one discourse) or used separately. By selecting the right discursive context, journalists can build their articles according to the political ideology desired by the media. In this process, the discursive context affects the relevance of discourse, meaning that journalists will choose a relationship with readers, whether to build a positive or negative orientation.

Almost the same as mass media, interaction on social media is also included in social interaction. Although not necessarily interpersonal in particular, participants can feel 'interactive engagement' with other participants (even if it is simply giving a response and the candidate does not really respond to that reaction). As a platform, social media must be able to provide a sense of interactivity, even though there is no interaction between participants. It means that social media allows participants to feel they are interacting with other participants even though the message sending process does not meet the criteria (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

Interactions in mass media and social media that show the existence of 'subjectivity' and 'collectivity', indicate the emergence of 'intersubjectivity' or direct relationships between individuals or groups to build discourse structures according to the context. Through this interaction, the togetherness of individuals is intertwined to form a kind of relationship that cannot be separated from one another. This relation does not only combine speech or action, but also emotional connection. Therefore, it is not surprising that this relation sometimes creates 'tension' between individuals. However, through this interaction and emotional relationship, the individual will experience himself as part of a community member who communicates with community members or other community members.
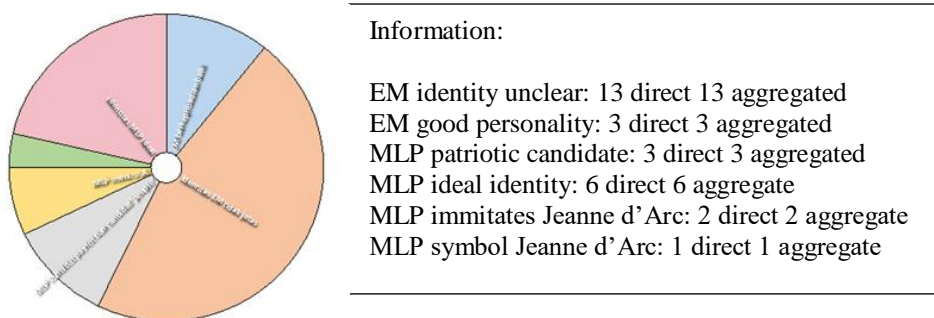
As part of the community members, individuals form impersonal structures that connect 'I', 'you', 'our' and 'we', 'he/she', and 'they'. In this impersonal structure, on the one hand 'I' can cooperate with 'you' to form 'we' or 'our'; and on the other hand 'I' also has to understand the speech and actions of 'you', 'he/she' or 'they'. This impersonal structure will form a network and produce a process that binds individuals together

in groups, political parties, states, and so on. This process is influenced by social, political, and historical facts.

The bonds of individuals in a group (in this study are related to political groups or political parties and the state) have the character of 'imprisoning' individuals, meaning that individual freedom is limited due to political norms and ethics regulated in the group. In this relationship, the individual seems to be subordinate in the group. However, in discursive interactions in mass media and social media, this 'limited freedom' seems to disappear, due to individuals can freely participate actively through speech in the interaction. The tensions that occur in political participation are good as long as they can improve the socio-political condition of a nation. Therefore, in this intersubjective relationship, the individual becomes a 'subject' who has thoughts to share with other 'subjects'.

The processes of intersubjectivity relations are shown, among others, through political personalization which has begun to develop over time with the support of the rapid development of communication media. Political personalization construction strategies are increasingly diverse, both in terms of discourse production and discourse consumption. The results of the coding show the media's reaction to the personalization of the presidential candidates as shown below.

Figure 1. Coding of public reactions in the media toward candidate personalization

Information:

EM identity unclear: 13 direct 13 aggregated
EM good personality: 3 direct 3 aggregated
MLP patriotic candidate: 3 direct 3 aggregated
MLP ideal identity: 6 direct 6 aggregate
MLP immitates Jeanne d'Arc: 2 direct 2 aggregate
MLP symbol Jeanne d'Arc: 1 direct 1 aggregate

Source: research data from Nvivo coding

From the table, it can be seen that on the one hand the media's views on EM include: EM identity is unclear at 32.89% coverage text and EM has a good personality and deserves to be president by 1.06% coverage text. On the other hand, the media's views on MLP include: MLP is a patriotic candidate for 6.72% coverage text, MLP has an ideal identity of 24.56% coverage text, MLP often imitates the figure of Jeanne d'Arc 4.06% coverage text, MLP became a symbol like Jeanne d'Arc 1.17% coverage text.

EM's victory in the first round as a presidential candidate promoted by the new party shocked many parties. EM was seem as an 'outside the party' candidate, with no experience, little funding and few backers. Ahead of the election, according to opinion polls, prospective EM voters fluctuate between 15% - 18% (Grand & Segaunes, 2016). Certainly, this phenomenon caused negative reactions regarding his political program, due to he was seen as not yet competent to become president. His previous job was as bank director at Rothschild, before being appointed manager since January 2009. After becoming manager, he became managing partner from December 2010 to 2012. Later, he left Rotschild to become part of François Hollande's government. His relationship with François Hollande was also considered by audiences to be an 'extension' of François Holland's rule, such as: *Macron défend le bilan de François Hollande* 'Macron defends François Hollande's performance record', *j 'ai l' impression d 'entendre la même chose avec hollande en 2012! Tous des marionnettes et s'en mettent plein les poches !!! Je suis écœurée* 'I heard the same thing with Holland in 2012! All dolls and full of promise!!! I'm fed up'.

Francois Hollande was considered the least popular president in French political history. Some of the programs he promised during the campaign did not carry out well, among others: unemployment, economy, education, marriage. Nevertheless, in his resignation speech on December 1st, 2016, Hollande claimed to have managed to run his program well, particularly the problem of unemployment. In fact, he said *je laisserai à mon successeur un pays en bien meilleur état que celui que j'ai trouvé* 'I will leave my successor (next president) a country in a much better condition than when I found it (France) first'. Since François Hollande

was considered a failed president and EM was considered Hollande's 'successor', EM programs are seen as imitating Hollande's programs.

The concurrent positions held by EM during the campaign period (finance minister and presidential candidate) were also alleged to be the cause of conflicts of interest and the ambiguity of EM's proposed program. The audience reacted with various comments, such as: *Il n'y a pas de boulot au ministère?* 'Is there no job at the ministry?', *Il faut qu'il démissionne. Il ne peut pas créer son propre mouvement tout en restant ministère* 'he must resign'. He can't make his own moves while remaining the minister'. EM left the socialist government of François Hollande on August 30th, 2016, after he founded his movement LaRem in April, and without going through an impasse. The 39-year-old former banker has not been a member of PS since 2009 and has refused to join the left-wing party. Before he left his ministerial post, EM had already started a campaign, and his actions were considered by the public to be a conflict of interest that would affect his political programs.

However, behind these negative comments, the media also commented on EM's good personality. EM is analogous to Kennedy due to he was young, energetic and eager to advance the country beyond the status quo that the French people like (Helaoua, 2018). The audience also mentioned that EM is the Trudeau of France due to EM and Justin Trudeau represent the new generation who become heads of state (the average head of state is 62 years old). In terms of political strategy, these two new generation of heads of state demonstrate mastery of modern and effective communication (Durand, 2017). Several media outlets described EM as a young and vibrant candidate. From the statements of those around him, for example his former teacher, EM was said to be a smart person and always got good grades where he studied. Even François Hollande mentioned EM as *le philosophe que tout le monde aimerait avoir* 'the son that everyone wants to have' (Aubel, 2017). Likewise with the audience, they also commented on social media concerning the goodness of EM, including the following: *Le président Macron met à notre service son intelligence, son immense force de travail, sa capacité d'écoute d'empathie et de séduction* 'President Macron devotes his intelligence to us, high morale, able to listen, empathetic and attractive', *il est jeune et patriote, il est cultivé,*

il est pour le travail, le respect la diversité. Ok. Après faudra juste faire ce que vous testez monsieur 'he is young and has a patriotic spirit, he is cultured, he is there to work, respects differences, ok, we have to do what he says". The public thought that EM's positive qualities would lead France to a better life through its innovative presidential projects (EM prefers to call *projet* 'project' rather than 'program').

From the point of view of her political opponent, MLP, she was described as a patriotic candidate, has an idealized identity but often 'identifies' herself with the figure of the French heroine Jeanne d'Arc. In its campaign, MLP emphasized the nation's need for the values of civilization, freedom and development. The need was also to fulfill the wishes of right-wing voters. MLP wanted to reach a wider range of potential voters, particularly workers, to support them against globalization that threatens civilization. This was what caused MLP to be identified with the title 'patriot' candidate. In fact, since 2014 the FN party social media has been named *les patriotes*. Public reactions as seen include: *Bravo Marine, ne lâchons rien! Vive notre Présidente, ses cadres, les patriotes de France!* 'Bravo Marine, don't give up! Long live our Presidents, leaders, patriots of France!', *Quel discours! Je me suis transporté au siècle précédent quand De Gaulle, Mitterrand, Pompidou, Malraux faisaient des discours qui ont fait honneur à la France!* 'What a speech! I was carried away to the previous century when De Gaulle, Mitterrand, Pompidou, Malraux made a speech bringing honor to France! *Revenir a la vrai France d'avant avec des valeurs, plus jamais vivre ce que nous avons vécu depuis cette abruti de hollande qui a mi la France en souffrance* 'returns to the old France, which has values that have never existed since led by bastard Hollande, who has brought France to misery'.

The idea of 'patriot' has historically been directed towards supporters of the French Revolution. This term was later used by far-right parties since 1880. In political discourse, this term ws often used by the FN party. However, in the 2017 campaign, the term 'patriot' was also used by right-wing candidates such as François Fillon, Nicolas Dupont-Agnan, as well as left-wing candidates such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Arnaud Montebourg. In the second round of elections, EM and MLP used the term 'patriot' to oppose and attack each other: EM used 'patriot' to

oppose MLP's 'nationalism' concept, whereas MLP used 'patriot' to oppose EM's 'globalism' concept. The definition of EM patriotism was to oppose MLP programs, namely economic programs (such as protectionist systems, and exit from the Euro currency), and political programs (immigration policies). On the other hand, MLP used the term 'patriot' to oppose the EM program, particularly regarding the liberal economic system, immigration policy, deregulation of labor law (Le Gal, 2017).

In addition, MLP was considered to have an ideal identity and a figure that capable of facing national problems and returning France according to national values, as was done by the heroine Jeanne d'Arc. This was expressed in lingual expressions such as: *donner une idée plus précise de cette «France apaisée» dont elle fait désormais son idéal* 'give the right idea of 'France in peace' which in turn makes her an ideal figure' (Albertini, 2016), *défend le plus et le mieux la démocratie* 'further defending a better democracy' (Galiero, 2017). The support for the identity concept offered by MLP was due to the audience that the MLP concept was different from the concept made by Jean-Marie Le Pen (MLP's father who was the leader of FN from 1972-2011). The strategy of political discourse, particularly regarding the populist characteristics of MLP, was different from the strategy of Jean-Marie Le Pen. In its campaign, MLP also promised to change the image and public perception of the FN party. Even though the MLP discourse has been wrapped in a more modern form, many still think that her discourse was still related to 'traditional' characteristics that maintain certain radicalism (Bocquet, 2018).

From the results of the coding analysis above, it can be seen that the media carries out the personalization construction of presidential candidates in various ways. The personalization strategy is carried out by the media and the public to support or bring down a presidential candidate. How personalization is formed by the public in the media in the context of the presidential election is described below.

The existence of a political constellation which is increasingly undergoing transformation, both in the domains of power, leadership and policy, requires a leader or politician who is able to control power, lead and dominate all policy processes. In this situation, political

personalization is very important for a leader to convince the audience that he is competent to face a very dynamic political transformation. Political personalization often occurs during presidential election campaigns, especially in established democratic countries. During the campaign, the attention of the public focused more on the attitudes and personalities of the presidential candidates when they responded to political, economic and social events or problems in the country. In fact, personalization sometimes leads to the personal life of a presidential candidate, for example during the election of the American president Barack Obama, the attention of the audience is more on the history of his family life. Likewise, in the election of French president Nicolas Sarkozy, public attention turned to his future wife at that time, namely Carla Bruni, a famous actress in France.

The development of political personalization, particularly during the presidential campaign, is caused, among other things: First, from the point of view of political communication, political parties considered that it was easier to convey messages to voters using individuals who had been recognized and identified by voters rather than through political parties. Individual figures who are already known by the audience will more easily attract attention and can influence audience choices. Second, the public will find it easier to hold accountable for government policies to one particular individual, rather than to an abstract entity, namely a political party. In this case, individual figures are considered as real representatives of political parties. Third, individual figures will find it easier to mobilize the masses to provide greater strength and support in the presidential campaign process. Moreover, with the help of the media, individual figures as presidential candidates, both in terms of personality and abilities, will visually attract the attention of the public more than political party entities. In essence, political personalization in the "postmodern campaign" serves to satisfy the interests of all political actors in the political process, namely political parties, presidential candidates, the public and the media.

It cannot be denied that technological developments, especially in the mass media, have made the process of political personalization more developed. Political personalization is a part of political communication that facilitates the emergence of charismatic leaders. In this case, a leader

figure no longer emerges from a transactional political communication process conveyed by a political party, but from an interpersonal process based on perceptions and expectations between the leader and his followers. Therefore, based on this phenomenon, an important requirement for a prospective leader is to allow his followers to trust him as a competent leader candidate (Garzia, 2011). Political personalization becomes very important in political communication, marked by the mention of candidates instead of parties; substitution of candidate images rather than party images; and mentioning the name of the party with the labeling of the candidate's name in various media; and holding debates between presidential candidates (Bean & Mughan, 1989; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; McAllister, 1996). This shows that the role of the presidential candidates personally and individually determines how the audience will view politics and how the audience will express their political preferences (Karvonen, 2010). Therefore, the political transformation in the current presidential campaign tends to focus more on "personalization" of the candidate figure. The political burden on individual political actors is increasing, on the contrary the political burden on political parties collectively decreases. In this case, according to Karvonen (2010) individual identity is more prominent than collective identity.

Conclusion

Individual identity related to political leadership is related to a realistic approach, namely how individuals perceive the political world realistically; and a constructivist approach, namely how individuals make subjective representations in their minds. According to the cognitive realism view, the cognition of physical and social reality occurs directly in individuals. Therefore, the object perceived by the individual can appear by itself and as it is directly without being mediated by cognitive structures. Conversely, according to the cognitive constructivism view, the cognition of reality occurs through the construction of mental images or certain mental images which are the result of interpretations and conclusions from stimulation received by individuals.

The development of the media and the transformation of political parties influenced the formation of political personalization. Therefore, presidential candidates must be able to create certain valuable and meaningful representations for voters. Therefore, the image of a presidential candidate is actually more "driven" by voters than by the presidential candidates themselves. Voters' perceptions are influenced by leader's personality features, including habitual patterns of behavior, thoughts, and emotions. According to this perspective, leader's characteristic features are relatively stable over time; different among other individuals; and can influence behavior.

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