

## **A Functional Analysis of the 2016 United States Presidential Debates through the Application of the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse**

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**Abstract :** In this study, the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse has been applied in order to investigate the 2016 Clinton-Trump presidential debates. All three kinds of utterances (acclaims, attacks, and defenses) were produced by the candidates supporting the usefulness of the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse for the analysis of the presidential debates as a type of political discourse. Attacks comprised 45% of the candidates' utterances, followed by acclaims at 33%; defenses were the least common function at 22%. The candidate from the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton, acclaimed more, whereas the Republican Party presidential candidate, Donald Trump, attacked more. Simple denial was the most common form of defense used by the candidates. Both candidates directed more of their utterances to policy (past deeds, future plans, and general goals) than character (personal qualities, leadership abilities, and ideals). Analyzing debates in terms of the functions performed by the candidates to increase their desirability and chance of winning the election, can lead to a better understanding of these significant political events as well as other forms of political discourse.

**Keywords :** acclaim, attack, defend, character, Democratic Party, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, policy, presidential debates, Republican Party

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