From a Victim to a Hero: A Visual Rhetoric of Donald Trump's Attempted Assassination

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ABSTRACT

The Former President of the United States (US) Donald Trump is the most controversial politician in the history of politics in that country because of his policies and statements. Trump is back and has the dominant political power to fight Vice President Kamala Harris in the presidential election held in November 2024. The incident of the attempted assassination of Trump on July 14th, 2024 while campaigning had many positive impacts in the midst of very strong political polarization. This research goal to explore the elements and meaning of visual rhetoric in two videos uploaded on social media about the attempt to assassinate Trump. The results of this research answer that the historical and contemporary context, formal description, nature, function and evolution of image indicate that the attempted assassination was a political consequence of a leader fighting in democracy. The most important meaning is Trump's effort to construct himself from a victim to become a hero through his performance to show unity and nationalism

INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump is a populist leader in the world who was once the most popular and dominated the world stage. Trump's statements and policies always attract attention because of their controversy and uniqueness.

Attention to Trump is increasingly strengthening after he will again compete as a presidential candidate against incumbent candidate Joe Biden in the United States (US) presidential election. On July 13, 2024, Trump was the target of the attempted assassination during the campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania by Thomas Matthew Crooks. The shooting incident was interesting because it was broadcast on a lot of television and the recorded video was spread widely on social media.

As an incident of a political attempted assassination, the video footage contained how Trump reacted and responded within seconds to what happened. Therefore, this research aims to examine Trump's attempted assassination from a visual rhetoric perspective.

In particular, Chun (2008) and Page (2020) have studied visual rhetoric about Trump. Chun (2018) revealed that the visuals displayed by Trump were in line with his rhetoric by showing an authoritarian style as an effort to gain popularity. Visual rhetoric against Trump, according to Page (2020), also shows three main themes which show that he is a traitor, subversive and tyrant which shows his controversy.

Why does it have to be Trump? Trump is an iconic leader because of his performance on the world stage (Page, 2020). Trump is a political leader who has uniqueness with exceptionalism and modern jermiad (Gilmore et al., 2020), has uniqueness and unusualness compared to other leaders (Pfiffner, 2017), has spectacular power (Lynch, 2017), and a unique personality profile with the high extraversion and low agreeableness (McAdams, 2017).

Moreover, the aim of studying visual rhetoric is to understand the dynamics of public persuasion (Olson et al, 2008), the purpose of communicating to provide information or persuade (Foss, 2005), dig deeper into emotions, values and ideas (Page, 2020), and the speaker's intentions. (Kenney, 2005).

To strengthen this research, the study of political assassination becomes a perspective to strengthen analysis and criticism. Political assassination efforts often have big impacts, such as unity and solidarity (Eyeman, 2011). In the context of US politics, many citizens also do not like the president, either his policies or statements, which trigger actions or attempted assassinations (Oliver & Marion, 2010). In fact, Perliger (2015) explains that political assassination is a form of social unrest and a decrease in the legitimacy of the political social order amidst political fragmentation and efforts to weaken democracy.

With this research background, this research has research questions about the elements of visual rhetoric and the meaning of the attempt to assassinate Donald Trump. This research also explores the elements of visual rhetoric and the meaning of the attempt to assassinate Donald Trump with a visual rhetoric perspective so as to show the communication messages that emerge.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Visual Rhetoric

Then, visual rhetoric became a study in communication science because it focused on "the image communicates, the intended audience, and the perceived message" (Patton, 2020, p. 126). The study of visual rhetoric is drawn from commonalities originating from metaphoric and semiotic criticism based on metaphor and a cultural knowledge base (Page, 2020).

As a theory, Foss (2005) explains that visual rhetoric is related to symbolic interaction, human intervention, and the presence of an audience which is part of communication and consists of signs, symbols and images. Kenney (2005) states visual rhetoric is associated with efforts to describe visuals and identify functions with the help of historical context.

In relation to politics, Miles (2023, p. 3) states that visual rhetoric is "an analysis of how visual elements are employed strategically for political effect – or rather more broadly, how the visual can move people politically."

The roots of this study are Aristotle's thoughts about ethos which is related to a person's credibility, logos is logical reasoning and pathos is related to emotions (Patton, 2020; Miles, 2023). Kenney (2005) expressed the same thing that this study carries the spirit of Aristotle and Burke where visual rhetoric can use myths, cliches, identification, and arguments.

As a method, visual rhetoric has several components starting from historical context, formal description of the visuals, identification of the function of the visuals, and evaluation of the function (Kenney, 2008). Meanwhile, Foss (2008) emphasizes that visual rhetoric is a method with an emphasis on deductive and inductive approaches based on visual symbols and visual images. Drawing conclusions based on communication artifacts makes the study of visual rhetoric unbiased and has high objectivity. Miles (2023) places visual rhetoric as a method with metaphor and repetition or pattern approach.

With the development of generative rhetorical criticism (Foss, 2008), Page (2020) makes visual rhetoric a method for constructing criticism and interpreting artifact features so that it can form certain theme categories. Meanwhile, Patton (2020), who continues to use the Foss (2008, p. 129) approach, focus more on emphasizing methodological framing with an emphasis on "1) nature of the image, (2) function of the image, and (3) evaluation of the image " thus producing a message that is interpreted from the symbol. Visual rhetoric remains based on two main things, namely criticism and interpretation based on communication artifacts with certain theme categories.

Political Assassination

The assassination of political leaders is political violence and conventional wisdom (Iqbal & Zorn, 2008). Political assassinations are often associated with acts of terrorism (Snitch, 1982), which are part of biopolitics (Grayson, 2012), and have political goals (Gazit & Brym, 2011).

Political assassinations are always terrible and terrible events (Eyerman, 2011). Political assassinations are generally not random events, but rather systematic events with political motives (Yammarino et al., 2013). Generally,

leaders who are socialized pragmatic and socialized ideological often become victims of murder (Serban et al., 2018).

According to Iqbal & Zorn (2008), the assassination of political leaders is a form of political violence that has a very broad impact on politics, economy and society. In his research, it was stated that the consequences of the assassination of political leaders are instability, political chaos and civil war in several countries (Iqbal & Zorn, 2008). The same thing was expressed by Yammarino et al. (2013) who revealed that the assassination of public leaders was carried out with political goals that could cause economic, social and political changes.

Meanwhile, Eyerman (2011) revealed that political assassination is often correlated with political violence that is common in the United States and becomes a catalyst in debates in society. The main cause of political assassination is social conflict influenced by context and behavioral problems (Serban et al., 2018).

METHODS

This research applies visual rhetoric (Foss, 2008; Kenney, 2008; Patton, 2020; Page, 2020; Miles 2023) as a research method. Keney (2008) explains that the visual rhetoric follows an interpretive paradigm which earns "a critical analytical essay in which authors state a thesis and then provide support for their arguments." (p. 153). Thus, as a research method, visual rhetoric is in the qualitative realm by producing a critical analysis with a strong and solid scientific basis.

Researchers viewed and examined several videos of Trump's shooting incident on social media from accounts belonging to US television media. However, the researchers chose two videos that represented and represented the incident. The first is a video uploaded by ABC News with the title Secret Service rushes Trump off stage at Pennsylvania rally with a duration of 2 minutes and 21 seconds which was uploaded on July 14th, 2024. This is a snippet from the Live Report video conducted by the ABC News television station. The second video selected was from the Fox 13 Seattle YouTube account with the title Crowd shouts "USA! USA!" after attempted attempted assassination on Trump and uploaded on July 14 2024 with a duration of 1 minute 58 seconds.

In the data collection process, researchers conducted a more thematic study by clustering topics related to political assassination attempts. After the thematic analysis was carried out, the researchers then conducted an analysis of the political context and background by adjusting to the parameters that had been set in the visual rhetorics analysis. Furthermore, a more interpretive analysis took into account the perspective of political assassination.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Elements of Visual Rhetoric Donald Trump's Attempted Assassination

Referring to the concept of visual rhetoric (Foss, 2008; Kenney, 2008; Patton, 2020; Page, 2020; Miles 2023) shows that there are five important elements, namely historical and contemporary context, formal description, nature, function and evaluation of image. The analysis will produce critical and interpretive findings and discussions.

1. Historical and Contemporary Context

Figure 1. Screenshot of Video of Attempted Assassination of Donald Trump (ABC News, 2024)

Historical context refers to the fact that US presidents or former US presidents have often been targets of assassination or attempted assassination in recent decades (Oliver & Marion, 2010). The reason is that the US president is the most influential person in the country and is the center of attention. Apart from that, the person who once served as US president also has many enemies. However, political attempts or assassinations cause cultural trauma as a form of identity crisis (Eyerman, 2011).

Meanwhile, the contemporary context shows Trump attending an open campaign in Pennsylvania, on July 14th, 2024, to raise support for the presidential election next November. The campaign was attended by many Trump supporters and broadcast live by many television stations. Trump is a controversial presidential candidate with a variety of the problems and policies to offer,

2. Formal Description

The first is a video uploaded by ABC News with the title Secret Service rushes Trump off stage at Pennsylvania rally with a duration of 2 minutes and 21 seconds which was uploaded on July 14th, 2024. This is a snippet from the Live Report video conducted by the ABC News television station. The formal description written in the video caption is "The Secret Service rushed former President Donald Trump off stage at a Pennsylvania rally".

The second video selected was from the Fox 13 Seattle YouTube account with the title Crowd shouts "USA! USA!" after attempted attempted assassination on Trump and uploaded on July 14 2024 with a duration of 1 minute 58 seconds. The formal description written in the video caption is "The shooting at former President Donald Trump's rally in Pennsylvania is being investigated as an attempted assassination of the former president and presumptive Republican nominee, law enforcement officials say."

3. Nature

The main elements present on FOX 13 Seattle and ABC News videos demonstrate the television journalistic standard, such as brief descriptions, locations, and live status. What's interesting is the video on FOX 13 Seattle where there is support such as donations or shopping for trinkets to support Trump. This cannot be separated from the fact that the FOX television network is known as a supporter of the Republican Party with a base of support for Republicans who are Trump supporters. Meanwhile, ABC News displays a news format such as a news report showing Breaking News about Trump's attempted assassination.

Regarding other elements of the concept, for example, the video broadcast by ABC News is indeed a television journalistic product that has been transferred to the social media channel, namely YouTube. As a news product, ABC News shows balanced efforts and carries an exaggerated emotional touch.

This is different from FOX 13 Seattle, which has adapted the video with social media touches such as subtitles and the sound of the conversation between Trump and Secret Service agents. As part of the Republican media, FOX 13 Seattle gave a dramatic twist and showed Trump as the victim of an attempted assassination.

4. Function

Perspective in the function of visual rhetoric analysis is to reveal what is prioritized for the audience, not from the speaker's point of view. Both videos uploaded by FOX 13 Seattle and ABC News show an informational function. However, it also invites people watching to become witnesses to the history of Trump's attempted assassination.

The video does not have a negative impact such as acts of violence, because it does not show the sniper shooting Trump, but shows Secret Service agents carrying weapons to be the former president. It also makes no bones about trying to show the political polarization occurring in the US. The reason is, everyone is against Trump's attempted assassination.

However, the video has any positive impact on Trump's political career as he faces the presidential election in November 2024. Trump's actions and statements show that he is presenting himself as trying to gain sympathy and support. He positioned himself as a shooting victim.

5. Evaluation

Figure 2. Screenshot of Video of Attempted Assassination of Donald Trump
(FOX 13 Seattles, 2024)

The video footage of Trump's attempted assassination uploaded by FOX 13 Seattle and ABC News shows its function as public information. The video was basically not intended to record and immortalize the moments of Trump's attempted assassination, but was intended to broadcast live the open campaign of the Republican presidential candidate. However, the recording went viral because it broadcast live the second-by-second process of Trump's murder.

There is nothing to suggest that video shows the historical context of the attempted assassination on Trump. The reason is, the video was originally intended as a campaign video. Because Trump was shot during the campaign, there is no historical context available.

However, people who follow US political developments are expected to know about the contemporary context in which the country will hold presidential elections which will be held in November 2024. Trump is the presidential candidate from the Republican Party who will fight against US President Joe Biden.

In terms of the topic or theme raised, it is special and exclusive because not many television media broadcast live Trump's campaign when the attempted assassination occurred. Television stations in the US have now expanded their presence on social media, especially on YouTube, to upload popular video clips that can be accessed by many people, not only in the US, but also throughout the world.

Furthermore, in terms of video format, both color and spacing indicate a live broadcast model equipped with location information and a short description. The ABC News video shows it as a live recording with comments from the news anchor, while FOX 13 Seattle only shows the actual incident without any description or explanation from the news anchor. The video shown

by FOX 13 Seattle was more faithful to the YouTube model, equipped with automatic subtitles showing conversations, including Trump's chat with Secret Service agents.

B. Visual Rhetoric Meaning of Donald Trump's Attempted Assassination

The main purpose of visual rhetoric analysis is to reveal meaning which can be in the form of messages or feedback. It can contain the denotative (literal) and connotative (suggested) meanings that have a direct impact on the audience or public. This meaning can also have a persuasive influence so that it can generate sympathy or support.

1. Saf

Figure 3. Screenshot of Video of Attempted Assassination of Donald Trump
(FOX 13 Seattles, 2024)

Trump was safe! It was something that was underlined. He was one of the former presidents who experienced an attempted assassination and survived. Even though he looked like he was only scratched by a bullet that missed and hit his ear. However, he was still bleeding. It shows that Trump only suffered minor injuries, and did not experience anything that threatened his life. Perliger (2015, p. 90) once suggested in research that "more attention needs to be given to the safety of the political leaders."

Surviving an attempted assassination is important. This is because the number of presidents and former presidents who survived shooting attempts was greater than those who died. The US political history records that several US presidents who survived shootings were Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama.

Safe is the main capital for Trump's continuation in the 2024 presidential election. Safe is also a parameter that determines that his political career is not finished, but will continue. Trump's survival from an attempted assassination also shows that he will provide a strong foundation from which he can expand his ambitions towards victory in the 2024 presidential election.

Furthermore, safe is also a construction built by Trump to strengthen his influence, especially among Republican voters. However, it is also an opportunity for him to expand his influence to US voters who have not yet decided on their vote. This is an opportunity for Trump to reach a niche of voters who do not yet know Trump or US voters who hate him.

Popularity is the main goal of populist leaders like Trump. The chance of surviving the shooting attempt made Trump construct himself as a safe president, a blessed US president, a protected US president. That will strengthen support among conservative voters who have been Trump's base of support. As a victim, Trump is trying to build a process of cultural trauma (Eyerman, 2011), where he wants to build associations and identification so that he cannot be separated from the memory traces of his supporters in the long term by constructing closeness, space and emotion.

2. Survive

The survive is more than safe. Survive is an ongoing journey. It is also like a voyage that will continue to sail. It's like life continues to live. Survive in politics also shows that there is no stopping or leaving the game, but will continue the game to achieve victory.

That's what Trump experienced during the shooting. He was still standing. He was still talking. He still survives. He still believes that the attempted assassination incident was actually an opportunity for his revival. Trump took advantage of this opportunity by encouraging unity. He also echoed the nationalism that is characteristic of the Republican Party.

Survive is a real form of existence which Trump shows by clenching his fists. He said, "USA, USA,.. USA". It also received acclaim and replies from his supporters by shouting the same thing. This existence is strengthened by the realization that he wants to show that is not just surviving, but will also continue to appear on the US political stage. He also has the attribute of always being the main player so he becomes an important part. Efforts to build a collective identity (Eyerman, 2011) were carried out by Trump with the aim of getting a long-term impact from the crisis.

Survive is the best chance that Donald Trump has to win the 2024 presidential election. He is in the public spotlight in the United States. This is confirmation of his struggle to gain sympathy and appreciation. By surviving, it shows that the struggle against what Trump is doing will be increasingly solidified by the campaign team.

Trump is known as a politician who breaks away from design so that it can be called "an anti-design disposition" with the aim of making himself not part of the elitist class Chun, 2008). In a study conducted by Hodson (2022) it also shows that Trump is not a charismatic leader, but a personal strongman.

3. Sacrifice

Trump shows his supporters that politics is sacrifice. He is willing to sacrifice himself for greater interests. This belief was constructed by Trump for rising and encouraging his supporters. It happened in a crisis situation in the status of an attempted assassination. However, Trump remains brave and unafraid by showing that he is a winner, not a defeated politician.

In politics, sacrifice is not about what is called sacrificing materialism, but spiritual sacrifice related to life. Politics in the United States is known as a difficult fight because of shooting incidents against the president or the former president. This shows that Trump has donated his life to broader US politics to realize his political agenda.

In the context of US politics, sacrifice does not mean giving up or giving up. But as an effort to construct the value of the struggle and build an ideology that will be instilled in the minds of supporters. Not just for the sake of not short-circuiting support for the upcoming presidential election in 2024, but to create a politics of sustainability.

The sacrifice is a construction that Trump built in the midst of various legal scandals that have entangled him. The public image that he is a leader has many problems which can be reduced so as to encourage the emergence of a fresher and clearer Trump. A study conducted by Chun (2018, p.16) also revealed that Trump's visual rhetoric reflects his personal style, namely "dictator chic".

4. Soloist

Figure 4. Screenshot of Video of Attempted Assassination of Donald Trump (ABC News, 2024)

Donald Trump was neither a backup player nor a spectator when the attempted assassination against him occurred. He is not a reserve player. He is not a shadow player. He is a soloist. That was a victory in itself for Trump because he was safe and survived.

The appearance of the soloist was due to a campaign that only presented Trump as a single person. He was not accompanied by anyone else. Even with his supporters in the background, Trump became central and the center of attention at that moment. It shows how Soloist's visual power is very strong in seeing Trump.

From a political perspective, luck cannot be denied. Although, that is also very expected. It's just that fate is on Trump's side. Despite the various conspiracy theories circulating widely on social media, Trump is indeed a skilled soloist. He took advantage of the moment about safety and survival in a few seconds to attract the attention of US citizens and the international community.

In the US politics is indeed closely identified with Soloist because vice presidential candidates or other factors are rarely dominant in the presidential elections. Personal struggles become a central topic. At that moment, Trump had a golden opportunity to win. He doesn't rely on anyone else.

When the Secret Service is present on Trump's stage, the narrative he plays remains solo and a single player. He still shows his face and shows that he is capable of appearing in public. He played a symbol of resistance and change in this critical moment. As research conducted by Chun (2008) shows that Trump is a leader who has built a reputation as "the consumer showman" (p. 18).

5. Service

Politics is a service. Besides, politics is a calling, and not just a duty. Donald Trump really emphasized this impression in playing his role. Shooting him was a risk for what he had done. Both when he served as president, and after he became the opposition. The risk of the words or policies he makes.

Service from a political perspective is still seen as something that is not related to positive things, but can also be seen as a negative thing. It really depends on the mindset and perspective of the person who sees and understands it. As a leader, Trump will have two services, namely to his supporters and to supporters of his enemies.

In service, a leader's contribution, a politician's inclinations and the direction taken by public figures will be the accommodation and foundation for him to show performance. This cannot be separated from the fact that Trump also has programs or policies that tend to be controversial. However, polarized US politics cannot be separated from two things that are mutually contradictory and contradictory. In a study conducted by Perliger (2015, p. 88) emphasized that "political assassinations are more probable in countries that suffer from a combination of restrictions on political competition and strong polarization and fragmentation".

By serving the United States, Trump built a political construct that has a clear line between black and white. The construction of not being a gray leader is a positive value for Trump to encourage him to win over groups who have previously doubted his attitudes and stance. Trump often displays visuals that show falsehood as a disruptive approach in the era of post-truth politics (Hodson, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the historical and contemporary context, formal description, nature, function and evolution of image indicate that an attempted assassination was a political consequence of a leader fighting in democracy. This is a negative consequence of leaders who often make policies which harm other groups or trigger hatred from other parties.

The most important meaning is Trump's effort to construct himself from a victim to become a hero through his performance to show unity and nationalism. As a populist leader, Trump is a good performer because he was able to dominate the campaign stage during his attempted assassination. He was able to show courage and determination to continue the struggle.

FURTHER STUDY

The research has many limitations, so further studies are needed related to the attempted assassination with various methodologies, such as ethnography or case study. The study of the attempted assassination can also be carried out by conducting comparisons with cases in various countries so as to obtain a more complex and more universal understanding.

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