

Running Head: YES YOU CAN

Intertextuality, Parody and Polyphony in Pepsi's® 2009 Presidential Inauguration Campaign

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Abstract

This essay explores Pepsi's 2009 advertising campaign as intertextual reference to Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualizations of heteroglossia and the utterance are combined with Julia Kristeva's discussion of intertextuality to create a theoretical framework for understanding how the ideological viewpoints inherent in the two ad campaigns reflect on one another. Voters and consumers are invited by Pepsi's logo, slogan, and online video campaign to read the advertisements in relationship to the celebrity status of new President Barack Obama. The interactive nature of the intertextual reference is critical to the overall persuasiveness of the Pepsi campaign.

Keywords: Pepsi®, Barack Obama, Intertextuality, Parody, Polyphony

Intertextuality, Parody and Polyphony in Pepsi's® 2009 Presidential Inauguration Campaign

In August 2008, as the Democrats were gathering in Denver's Pepsi Center to nominate Barack Obama for President, *Slate* reporter James Ledbetter was commenting on the interesting connections between the candidate and the cola.¹ Obama's red, white, and blue logo bears some resemblance to the logo Pepsi has been using since 1991 (Capparell, 2007; Ledbetter, 2008). Obama's campaign focused on college initiatives and empowering young voters, and Pepsi's ad campaigns have always been directed towards a youth market (Hollander & Germain, 1992; Capparell, 2007; Ledbetter, 2008; Winograd & Hais, 2008). Furthermore, Obama's historical significance as the first African-American Presidential candidate echoes Pepsi's long-time historical association with African-Americans; the company employed African-American sales reps long before it was a popular decision, and the majority of their market has always been African-American (Capparell, 2007; Ledbetter, 2008). These relationships between Obama and Pepsi could be passed off as mere coincidences, but the soft drink companies' advertising campaign following the election was hardly an accident. During the weeks preceding Obama's inauguration, Pepsi revealed a new logo that looked even more like Obama's and the slogan "Yes You Can," which echoed one of the main catchphrases from the President's campaign, "Yes We Can." This parroting was followed by a Web-based video campaign directed at the new President (Bowman, 2009; Hall, 2009; Poniewozik, 2009). By all appearances, Pepsi was taking advantage of Obama's recent win and the various links between the President and their product. By uttering "yes, you/we can," Pepsi conflated the communal spirit of the democratic process with the rugged individualism of the active participant. The soft drink company's advertising campaign used intertextuality, parody, and polyphony to lend credence to the speculated

¹ Please see the Author's Note at the end of the article

relationship between their product and the President. This essay will use Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia and Julia Kristeva's later conceptualization of intertextuality to discuss the link between Obama's presidential campaign and Pepsi's January 2009 advertising campaign. In particular, we will address the way Pepsi relied on the cultural literacy of their audience to read the link between the two campaigns through their logo, their slogan, and their YouTube video "Open Letter to the President."

Intertextuality

Kristeva's discussion of intertextuality is rooted in Bakhtin's conceptualization of the utterance. An utterance is a full unit of speech necessarily complete in and of itself (Bakhtin, 1981; 1986). Words and sentences have the potential to be complete thoughts, but are not always necessarily complete. Some words and phrases may only be understood with reference to the language surrounding them; for example, the phrase "just do it" takes on completely different meanings depending on whether the context is a shoe store or a horror film. An utterance conceptualizes an author's completed thought and pulls its meaning from multiple locations at once. On the one hand, the author's tone and style serve to contextualize meaning within a given exchange of utterances. On the other hand, there are cultural and historical forces that act on an utterance to give it a broader social meaning. According to Bakhtin (1981), "every utterance participates in the 'unitary language'...and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia" (p. 272). The key component of the utterance is that it *cannot exist without other utterances*. The meaning of a particular utterance – a particular speech act – occurs through transgressive and transformative contact with multitudes of other utterances to produce this heteroglossia, this "many languages." Heteroglossia is the stratification that takes place when multiple words from multiple languages act towards a single object. Meaning is thus not inherent

to any texts; the echoes present within the utterance work together to create meaning for each individual listener.

The heteroglossia inherent in the utterance was critical to Kristeva's conceptualization of intertextuality. Listeners and speakers negotiate the meaning of any discrete utterance by locating it within the context of an exchange and within a larger social/historical context (Bakhtin, 1981; 1986). Kristeva (1977/1980) uses a similar calculus to understand how words and phrases derive their meaning through intertextuality. Words and phrases themselves do not have any inherent meaning: their meaning is taken from learned and common usage. Whenever anyone encounters a word, the meaning of that word is determined along two axes: the "horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and vertical axis (text-context)" (Kristeva, 1977/1980, p. 66). The horizontal axis contains information about the meaning of the word as it is understood in the context of the exchange. The vertical axis contains the multiple meanings of the word as it has been used in other settings and exchanges. At the moment of use, the listener's interpretation comes from the intersection between these two axes.

Intertextuality, as we have discussed so far, has focused on the intersection of multiple meanings within a unit of language. Tannenbaum and Goldstein (2005) argue that Kristeva's notion of intertextuality can be used to understand how individuals read not only language but also multi-media texts. As we will show in this essay, the values expressed by both the Pepsi advertising campaign and the Obama Presidential campaign interplay in unique and interesting ways. The similarities between the images, words, and videos in the two campaigns function as signs to the audience that they should look for other similarities in the two. According to Tannenbaum and Goldstein (2005) the ability to read visual texts using intertextuality was increased in cases where written text and visual text worked together (Further evidence of this

can be found in Heiligmann & Shields, 2005 and Morgan, 2005). These images do not operate in isolation; they are “structured, created, and interpreted vis-à-vis various influences affecting authors and their audiences as well as their prior knowledge of other texts, cultural norms, and other connotations” (Tannenbaum & Goldstein, 2005, p. 126). Building on these ideas, this essay will explore how the intertextual references of the two campaigns allow them to comment on and strengthen one another.

Reading Obama’s and Pepsi’s Campaigns

Pepsi entered the cola scene 110 years ago and immediately went after the biggest name in the industry, Coca-Cola (Capparell, 2007). Haig (2004) referred to Pepsi as a “distinction brand,” when they entered the market, because they created their identity in opposition to the dominant soft drink (p. 114). While they have consistently remained the number two brand in their market, the choice to pit their product against the number one brand has kept the company alive (Capparell, 2007; Haig, 2004). Many corporations, when introducing a new product, will stress the similarities between what their selling and the already recognizable product. Pepsi has always sold its drink as the “new” product, the “alternative” product (Haig, 2004, pp. 114-115). Similarly, Obama’s 2008 Presidential campaign utilized this spirit of newness and distinctness. When he announced his candidacy in 2007, Obama was competing in the Democratic primaries against a candidate whose win was being called “inevitable” (Chait, 2007). The Obama team cast frontrunner Hillary Clinton as a “Washington insider” and pushed forward the notion that it was time for a change (Greider, 2007; Kunin, 2008). In this way, Obama mirrored Pepsi’s strategy as a “distinction brand.” Obama’s triumph must have resonated with the perpetually number two cola. The link between Pepsi as the distinct choice of colas and Obama as the distinct choice of candidates would have made the President an ideal celebrity spokesperson for the product. Still,

getting Obama to be a celebrity spokesperson would be a stretch, so Pepsi worked around this issue by linking the President to the product without directly using his name or image. Indeed, by linking the images from their campaign with the images in Obama's, Pepsi could tie their product to the successful candidate.

The reason this linking works is because individuals do not read words or images in isolation; instead, they are read as part of a larger cultural text. As media scholar John Fiske (1987) has shown, in our contemporary media-saturated culture, it is much more acceptable for symbols to stand in for people and ideals. The relationship between the Obama campaign and Pepsi's campaign is not confined to the 2009 Pepsi advertisements. The message of Obama's political campaign can be seen as part of a larger scheme of advertising built on the idea of change and a focus on youth markets, and this focus can be seen as part of a moment of generational shift (Hollander & Germain, 1992; Winograd & Hais, 2008). The placement of Obama's campaign within this larger scheme may help to explain the swift adoption of the concepts behind the advertisements: they were building on principles with which audiences were already comfortable. The reading of advertisements relies on individuals' placement of them within the larger scheme of advertising, and on the placement of advertisements within a system of "cultural codes" (Heiligmann & Shields, 2005, p. 43). On television, these cultural codes amount to what Fiske (1987) calls "agents of intertextuality" which "constitute...our cultural world" (p. 4). By utilizing these visual metaphors, the Obama campaign "encoded" their political strategies and messages within an already-known field of "the common sense of a society" (Fiske, 1987, p. 6). Viewers of the Obama campaign and the Pepsi campaign recognized familiar symbols and motifs in each and could then translate their understanding of *those* symbols to the larger messages of each ad campaign.

In the larger scheme of advertising, “Pepsi’s marketing has, for decades, tried to exude youthful energy, from the early 1960s attempts to adopt baby boomers as the ‘Pepsi generation’ to the 1990s fantasy commercials depicting Pepsi as a veritable soda fountain of youth” (Bowman, 2009, p. 62). One of Pepsi’s most recent slogans, the famous “Choice of a New Generation,” sounds a lot like the theme of the Obama campaign, which heavily geared its message of change towards college-age voters (Bowman, 2009). This is not to say that the Obama campaign consciously drew on Pepsi’s advertisements, but rather that the two ad campaigns drew on a similar set of cultural codes to which their audiences had become accustomed. What may have been a coincidental relationship between Obama and Pepsi during the election appeared pronounced and intentional with the release of the soft drink company’s 2009 campaign. Three aspects of the Pepsi ad campaign significantly related to Obama’s Presidential campaign: the 2009 Pepsi logo, the Pepsi slogan, and the video “Open Letter to the President.”

Pepsi Logo as Celebrity Endorsement

The intertextual references created by the new Pepsi logo allowed the product to associate itself with Obama’s celebrity without requiring the President’s actual endorsement. The new logo for Pepsi was not an easy venture; it took over 5 months to design the new symbol (Zmuda, 2008). Just paying a firm to take that much time to design the new logo is estimated to have cost more than \$1 million, and the company spent even more than that to change billboards, trucks, vending machines, stadium signs, and other items that displayed the old logo (Zmuda, 2008). Only the 11th logo Pepsi has had in 110 years, the new logo (see Figure 1) features a circle with a yin-yang like red, white, and blue design (Zmuda, 2008). Previous Pepsi logos have featured similar designs, going back to the early 1960s. The original 1898 logo for Pepsi featured

a highly calligraphic script, inscribing the words “Pepsi-Cola” on the bottles (see Figure 2, from <http://www.pepsigallery.com/>). According to the official Pepsi history webpage, the first symbolic Pepsi logo was designed in 1962 as a way to “modernize” the product (see

Figure 3). This was the first time customers would see the distinctive red, white and blue layout. The classic white stripe between the red and blue on the Pepsi logo has traditionally been curved but has generally sat in a horizontal plane (see Figure 4). For the first time, with this new 2008 logo, the stripe is tilted up to one side. The Obama logo (see Figure 5) is also circular and features the red, white, and blue color scheme. Pepsi's logo is red on top and blue on the bottom, and Obama's logo is blue on top and red on the bottom. All these factors create a mild resemblance between the two images. However, the biggest resemblance between the symbols has to do with the white stripe on the Pepsi logo and the white stripes on the Obama logo. In both logos the stripes are curved and tilted up towards the right side of the image. If one reads the image left-to-right, as is often the case with text in Western cultures, the visual seems to suggest that things are "looking up." The link between the two images was reinforced by Pepsi's choice to release the logo during the weeks leading up the inauguration.

One might argue that the link is tenuous, since Obama did not directly associate himself with the product. However, research on celebrity endorsements has shown that it is not always necessary for the celebrity to voice approval for the product; simply alluding to a relationship between the celebrity and product allows the viewer to make inferences about the nature of that relationship (Leiss, Kline, Jhally, & Botterill, 1990; Giles, 2003; Levine, 2003; McCracken, 2005). Pepsi provides intertextual references to Obama and encourages the consumer to construct the details of the relationship. Advertisements today rely on "postmodern techniques such as pastiche, parody, and plagiarism that imply a certain degree of media literacy on the part of the audience" (Heiligmann & Shields, 2005, p. 46). Because of this, "ads have the ability to signify meaning to readers when they know the cultural codes that allow them to reference what

the signs replace” (Heiligmann & Shields, 2005, p. 43). According to Heiligmann & Shields (2005) certain signs are culturally charged; these signs are bound up with increased cultural significance that reflects on the product they are selling. In the months leading up to the inauguration Obama as a person became a symbol that was emotionally charged with citizens’ feelings about a nation in transition (Winograd & Hais, 2008). Obama represented change, transition, and a sense of newness, and the association between Obama and Pepsi allowed the brand to capitalize on these ideals.

There is some advantage for Pepsi to create the intertextual reference to Obama without directly linking the company and the President. The persuasive power of intertextuality relies on “its use of resources in the larger intertext to involve the user in the construction of the text’s meaning. In some instances, intertextual references function in the same way as enthymemes did in Aristotle’s rhetorical logic” (Warnick, 2007, p. 119). Intertextual references naturally and necessarily involve the active participation of the audience to make the connections between the disparate entities. The persuasive nature of these advertisements comes in part from individuals constructing the relationship between the celebrity and the product and in part from individuals constructing their own relationship to the product through the celebrity. As Jenkins (2006) has shown, audience participation is a particularly effective method of directly marketing a product: “consumers seek to act upon the invitation to participate in the life of a franchise” (p. 20). Audience participation in marketing can be as simple as word-of-mouth promotion or as complicated as text-messaging a call-in program to vote for a favorite *American Idol*. However audiences participate, the media producers benefit because the participators *personalize* the message when they deliver it to another audience member.

In terms of the persuasive nature of the ads, however, it is this personalization of the construction that makes the ad campaign's message persuasive in different ways to different audience members. Like Bakhtin's utterances, which not only exist in relation to *one another*, but are dialogic *in and of themselves*, these intertextual references are reliant on an audience member's own cultural background. Each utterance is double-sided, double-voiced, for the utterance both comes from a particular speaker's individual socio-culturally constructed background, and directs towards a particular listener, with his or her own individual socio-culturally constructed background (Bakhtin 1984, p. 304; 1986, pp. 93-94). The reliance on an audience's background has potential for a strategic ambiguity in an intertextual reference. Their reference is possible but not definite. The ambiguity protects the company from social liability in cases where an audience member does not support the location where the reference originated.

The use of Obama to advertise Pepsi is both a traditional move and a new one. It is traditional to use celebrities to market products to the masses, but it is different for a political figure to be the celebrity who is being used (Bowman, 2009). Zacharias and Arthurs (2008) point out that, during the election, the media contextualized Obama as a younger, more attractive candidate than both Clinton and his later Republican rival John McCain, and as more of a celebrity than as a rising political figure. Thus, the use of images related to him for endorsement and for advertising makes this connection to Pepsi particularly interesting. As Obama's image reflects onto Pepsi, the product also ultimately must influence individuals' views of Obama; "although advertising's intended purpose may be to sell products, its constant communication of ideologically defined images gives it the power to contribute to the overall characteristics of a culture" (Heiligmann & Shields, 2005, p. 43). Just as Pepsi used Obama's image, Obama must deal with his own "branding," his own public persona. The construction of this relationship

between product and candidate ultimately links the politician with popular and consumer culture. It reinforces the notion that he is a “celebrity,” a role that has traditionally been culturally separated from the role of politician. It is hard to say now what Obama’s persona will look like over the next few years, but ultimately the image of him as celebrity may impact his ethos as a political figure and his role as a political figure may impact his celebrity ethos. Pepsi is protected to some extent by the ambiguity in the relationship, and also by literally *being a product*, Obama may have some difficulty controlling the way media and consumer forces frame his identity *as* a product.

Pepsi Slogan as Parody

Through both the author’s voice and the contextual situation in which the utterance exists, the utterance becomes a complete thought. This conceptualization of the utterance is useful for evaluating advertising specifically, especially as the traditional conception of the “slogan” functions as a highly visible utterance in contemporary culture. For example, Pepsi’s famous “Choice of the New Generation” is neither word nor sentence, but is a complete thought in and of itself. As utterances, slogans are often only able to summarize their product because of the cultural references embedded within them. During the 2008 Presidential Campaign, Obama built his political persona around the rhetoric of three words: hope, change, and progress. It is from the ideas bound up in these three words that the campaign’s two early political slogans emerged. In the early days of the campaign, the slogan alternated between “Change We Can Believe In” and “Change We Need.” Then, after the New Hampshire Primary, the campaign got a new slogan from a surprising source: a music video. The slogan “Yes We Can,” arguably the most popular phrase from the 2008 election, originated from a music video based on Barack Obama’s concession speech in the New Hampshire Primary. The music video was created by the

Black Eyed Peas' Will.i.am and it received an Emmy in 2008 – one of the first Emmys awarded for new media creative enterprises (Garfield, 2008). The video focused on Obama's repetition of the phrase "Yes We Can" and quickly turned this utterance into the campaign slogan. Pepsi used this phrase in their 2009 ad campaign and turned it into a reference to both a political movement and the product's packaging. The resulting slogan from the company was "Yes You Can."

The slogan "Yes You Can" elevates the Pepsi advertising campaign from a simple allusion to Obama's political ideology to a parody of the presidential campaign. Parody is a special case of what Bakhtin (1984) called double-voicedness; that is a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (p. 6). In the case of parody, the "unmerged" voices do not completely synch up; that is, they contain some conflict that Bakhtin refers to as the hidden polemic. The conflict within the text emerges as a "blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object. A word, directed toward its referential object, clashes with another's word within the very object itself" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 195). Parody literally reads one meaning in light of the other: for example, a "ruler" is both the authority figure and a way to complete a measurement. When one is "read" (or used) in light of the other, the parodic implications of the text emerge.

Parody is more than a pun, however. When one hears the term parody, it often signifies joking or a mocking tone, and for some more simplistic parodies, mocking might be the only reason for using the stylistic. In fact, a true parody is much more complex (Bakhtin, 1981). True parodies contain two voices speaking simultaneously, and for the stylistic choice to function properly neither of those voices can be destroyed (Bakhtin, 1981). A parody works by using "another's word, giving it a new meaning while retaining the meaning it already had. The result is a word with two significations: it becomes *ambivalent*" (Kristeva, 1977/1980, p. 73, author's

emphasis). A true parody speaks in all directions simultaneously, and requires the audience to be sufficiently culturally literate to bring meaning to the text (Harries, 2000; Gray, 2005). Harries (2000) argues that “generations of kids raised on television have developed a certain ‘knack’ for appreciating the ironic... The popularization of parody makes the irony of postmodernism less threatening, less radical” (p. 22). This parody of the Obama slogan would likely be very popular with Pepsi’s target audience since they have been trained by the media to read this type of text.

Within the Pepsi slogan exists multiple, and potentially conflicting, messages that the audience can therefore interpret. There is (1) the original reference to the Obama campaign, (2) a reference to the individual as consumer, and (3) a punning joke about the nature of agency and commodification. First, the slogan embodies the Obama campaign’s sense of agency and social change and this seems directly aligned with Pepsi’s campaigns in the past (Hollander & Germain, 1992). Obama’s campaign tapped into a notion of civic pride and individual agency that was very much a part of the history of the country (Winograd & Hais, 2008). The phrase “Yes We Can” affirmed the campaign’s ideology that if individuals join together they could change the future of the nation. The phrase revels in its ambiguity: it does not say *what* specifically individuals can do, it celebrates the fact that *they can do anything*. The ambiguity of the phrase may have had some appeal to a postmodern generation, because it implied a sense of agency that every individual could help to determine the future. Pepsi’s ad campaigns have also long appealed to a youth market and attempted to capture of the values of each new generation (Hollander & Germain, 1992; Capparell, 2007). In that way the alignment between Pepsi and Obama seems a continuation of the company’s overall message.

The second reading of the slogan comes from the company changing the *we* to *you*; this choice alters the phrase from a political agenda to a marketing one. The term “we” is indicative

of the grassroots movements that seemed to push forward the Obama campaign. As Jenkins (2006) has shown, much recent cultural activity has had its roots in grassroots endeavors. As media conglomerates converge into larger and larger organizations, many consumers are reacting by forming political-minded grassroots organizations for their own media presentation, to “bring the flow of media more fully under their control” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 18). Indeed, as Atton (2004) describes, some of the most successful media outfits operating today emerge from independent media outlets. What is critical here is that these independent, grassroots media campaigns mirror modern political grassroots campaigning, and the Obama team capitalized on that similarity to reference the media campaigns. However, when Pepsi switched the term from “we” to “you,” it brought with it the semantic difference between community members working-together and an individual’s singular buying power. The original agency and political ideology of the statement is maintained, but layered on top of that message is a statement about the importance of each individual’s *acceptance of a system* as opposed to collective force. The semantic shift of pronoun does not just change the subject of the utterance, but the entire meaning of the phrase. The political power of the group is subsumed by the consumerism of the individual. In this way, Pepsi layers a commercial message on top of the political message.

Finally, the word “can” in the ad becomes ambiguous: containing both agency and the hidden polemic. The word “can” potentially refers both to the ability to accomplish something and to the packaging in which many soft drinks come. The pun solidifies Pepsi’s reading of the Obama campaign: whereas Obama appeared to want to keep a campaign of agency, hope and optimism (you “can” do it), Pepsi’s reference underscores a heft, a physicality, a density (a “can” of soda). By using the word “can,” Pepsi intertextually references *both* meanings: it is through

this ambiguity that Pepsi is able to both align the company with an ideology and capture a market, and make a joke about that ideology, allowing them to capture the opposing market.

The Pepsi slogan “Yes You Can” can be read in these three ways, all of which co-exist within the statement at the same time. The parody may not destroy the speech but it does call into question and interrogate its underlying premises. Parody “can both show how the genre has housed a given ideology and made it appear ‘natural,’ and denaturalize that ideology’s presence, by rendering it a fully visible object of attention” (Gray, 2005, p. 227). By calling the Obama campaign into view and making a potential joke about the nature of agency and consumerism, the Pepsi campaign invites the audience to interrogate the ideology of the Obama campaign. That interrogation creates a sense of ‘knowing,’ and “the point of such advertising has always been to invite younger consumers into a community of the knowing, of those who get the joke” (Bowman, 2009, p. 62). Being on the inside of the joke also places the audience on the inside of the Pepsi community. In this way, Pepsi benefits from the ambiguity of the intertextual reference, while once again calling into question the referent of the text. This notion of calling into question is reinforced further by the online video campaign organized by the company during the Inauguration.

Polyphony in “An Open Letter to the President”

On 14 January 2009, almost a week before Obama was sworn into office, Pepsi released a video campaign called “An Open Letter to the President.” This original video featured a collection of clips starring entertainers such as Lady Gaga, Eva, Wil.i.am, Jeff Gordon and Keenan Thompson, all of whom came together to form a video letter to the President. This letter first congratulates Obama on winning office, and then informs him that citizens will be putting together videos about what they want from the new President. The video does not have a *clear*

political agenda and it is not *necessarily* in favor of Obama. It is more of a call for the President to listen to the people who put him in office. The video also kicked off an ad campaign by Pepsi where they invited individuals to post videos on the company site saying what they want Obama to do now that he is in office. In the two months after the Pepsi video was posted it had more than half a million views on YouTube. This video functions as a subtle reference to the campaign video “Yes We Can.” Both the Pepsi and the Obama videos make use of what Bakhtin called polyphony as a persuasive strategy.

Bakhtin (1986) originally conceived of polyphony as a way to describe the multi-voiced nature of discourse in novels, specifically in the work of Dostoyevsky. Bakhtin (1986) said that tension in the novel is created by the combination of distinct voices all pulled together to create a single text, and all maintaining their own agency within that text. Each of these voices maintains a unique identity, but all lend themselves to the creation of a single narrative by a single author (Bakhtin, 1986). The fully developed voices within the text open up not just possibilities for the characters but for the fully developed worlds these characters represent. The ability for these characters to maintain full consciousness within the world constructed by the author, speaks to the ability of the reader to maintain that same consciousness while entering the world of the text. The multi-voicedness inherent to the form of the novel was what gave it artistic value. Online, this form of speech may come naturally, since so many texts are authored anonymously; it is easier to accept a single text made up of many voices and many contributors (Warnick, 2007). The “Yes We Can” video and the “Open Letter to the President” both exhibit characteristics of Bakhtin’s notion of polyphony.

As of March 2009, Will.i.am’s “Yes We Can” music video had been viewed more than 17 million times on YouTube; that is more than enough views to grant it the status of viral video.

The video is based on a speech by Barack Obama during the New Hampshire Primary, in which Obama's speech is overlaid with various celebrities and musicians playing music, singing, and repeating phrases from the speech. On its surface, this certainly meets Bakhtin's (1986) definition of a polyphonic text: a single text or utterance with multiple voices echoing throughout. What makes this text particularly interesting is the agency of all the speakers is maintained while repeating someone else's words. Bakhtin (1986) argued that novels, in their most artistic form, contain not only multiple voices, but multiple characters each with an identity distinct from the author of the text. These characters seem to have an agency separate from the author's will. In the "Yes We Can" video, all the individuals repeat the words of Obama, and one could then view them as either parroting or as adopting the politician's political ideology. However, the phrase they are repeating reinforces each participant's sense of political agency rather than a politician's political agenda or ideology. Additionally, one might assume that because Will.i.am "authored" the video he somehow worked as puppet master, manipulating the participants' voices. However, each individual in the text is given a chance to complete an utterance, making each an independent voice with fully completed thoughts. Because of this, the viewer reading the text may read all the individuals as participating in a singular document, but it is evident that each one does so while maintaining their own distinct voice and identity. The same can be said for the "Open Letter to the President."

Will.i.am, who created the "Yes We Can" video, also participates in Pepsi's video campaign. As a participant, he functions as an intertextual link between the two videos, inviting a media literate audience to once again read the (conscious) link between Pepsi and the Obama campaign. This video does not have all the individuals repeating another individual's text, but it does have all the individuals working together to create a singular text. Much like with the

Obama video, the individuals participating in this text do so without giving up any individual political ideologies. It might seem strange or confusing to have a singular political text with so many different ideologies, but Jackson (2007) points out that in a culture of mash-ups and remixes, texts like these are becoming increasingly acceptable. However, to call this video a “mash-up” is, strictly speaking, a misnomer. Mash-up videos typically bring “together disconnected and mutable information from multiple and disparate sources to maintain the form of a coherent, meaningful whole” (Jackson, 2007, pp. 412-413; see also Shiga, 2007; Gunkel, 2008, p. 489; Kendall and Schmidt, 2008, p. 15). Thus, the term “mash-up” originally referred to a “bastard art form” for which artists would illegally appropriate and fuse together two different copyrighted audio recordings (Gunkel, 2008, p. 450). However, here the term mash-up is being used in a more general sense, to refer to the combination of two or more disparate elements that form a unique object or concept that retains characteristics of its constituent components while simultaneously presenting something new. Infusing the traditional “mash-up” is the sense of each component retaining its original flavor. While the Pepsi video does contain different artists all contributing their own voice, each blends together to make a unique whole. The Pepsi video encourages “action” but maintains neutrality by not stipulating the ideological underpinning for the action. By leaving the individual voices of the participants “open” – that is, by allowing them the appearance of voicing their own words and their own thoughts, Pepsi gives the viewer a particularly crafted slice of a meaningful campaign.

This video, like many of the other elements of the recent Pepsi campaign, works to reinforce the link between Pepsi and Obama while protecting the corporation from any liability should a consumer dislike the new President. In the previous section, we mentioned that the parody invited multiple readings of the slogan and in doing so, interrogated the motives behind

the original Obama campaign. A consumer could read the link to political agency from the Obama campaign and construct a favorable relationship to the politician and the product. However, a consumer could also read the hidden polemic within the text and construct the ad as a challenge to the political notions of the original campaign slogan. This video makes use of polyphony similar to parody, but what makes it distinct from the slogan is that there is no hidden polemic. The potential for multiple conflicting voices is at the forefront of the video, not buried within a single utterance. The Pepsi ad, by inviting individuals to speak to the President, allows the consumer to construct multiple types of relationships. By allowing the intertextuality of the Pepsi ad to reach out to individuals who like or dislike the politician, this Pepsi video speaks to all who can read the cultural codes.

Conclusion

For both Obama and for Pepsi, the 2008 campaign was of major consequence. The meaning of the word “campaign,” however, takes on different flavors depending on whether it was used by Obama or by Pepsi. For Obama, the “campaign” was an illustration of the power of grassroots movements, of clear and directed strategies of collating and collecting information about voters, and about creating an impressive array of techniques to garner votes and increase voter knowledge. For Pepsi, however, “campaign” has connotations for advertising, for promotion, and for public relations. The Pepsi campaign is directed as well, but instead of targeting voters, Pepsi targets consumers (many of whom are the same). Instead of increasing voter knowledge of the product, Pepsi increased consumer awareness. And importantly, instead of harnessing grassroots politicking, Pepsi emphasized the power of the individual, the activity of the consumer.

That there are similarities between the Obama campaign and the Pepsi campaign is hard to dispute. Although we interpret these similarities as intertextual, polyphonous and parodic, it would be possible for others to interpret them differently: perhaps as deliberate political machinations of the Obama team, or as an attempt on Pepsi's part to undermine the political process itself by demonstrating the consumerism at the heart of campaigning. Our conclusion, that through the intertextual references to the Obama campaign, Pepsi both supported and parodied Obama's message of hope, change, and progress, indicates the larger cultural ramifications of campaigning. Pepsi's logo, its slogan, and its video campaign were all targeted in the same way as were Obama's messages of politics. Indeed, in this essay we have shown the numerous ways that Pepsi connected its 2008 campaign to that of Obama. However, equally interesting – and implicating – is how Obama's campaign may have taken a lesson from Pepsi as well. As Bowman (2009) has stated, "that's the revolution in advertising that has revealed itself in the new Pepsi campaign: advertising is now intellectually respectable" (p. 63). For Obama's campaign, Pepsi must have offered a delicious alternative to the hegemonic operation of Coca-Cola, with its conservative slogan of "just for the taste of it." Given the previous administration's attitudes of laissez-faire economics and "just for the hell of it" bombings, Obama brought to the presidential race his own particular brand of underdog strategies. Just as Pepsi used Obama, one could argue that Obama's campaign made use of Pepsi's status as perennial number two in our culture.

In sum, we can glean a number of salient details about the twined roles of advertising and politics in today's political market. The intertextual connections between the Pepsi and the Obama's campaigns demonstrate the importance of image and of appealing to the mass voter/consumer. The parodic implication of linking Pepsi's slogan to Obama's highlights the

value of the dichotomy between collective action and individual power. Pepsi's cooption of Obama's aesthetics for the YouTube videos prompts a re-evaluation of traditional ways to establish voice and authorship in digital sponsorship.

However, what might be of the most importance in the combination of the Pepsi and the Obama campaigns is the reliance on the active audience to piece together the meanings of both campaigns from each other's. This has important implications, both for advertising and media literacy, and for the study of political communication. More research into the uses of intertextuality and parody in political campaigns may deepen our understanding of the use of these important cultural theories in active politics. As we have seen, Bakhtin's heteroglossia, from which Kristeva formed her theories of intertextuality, necessarily and inevitably emerges from the active participation of all readers and speakers in a society. An active audience breeds a style of marketing suited for both politics and contemporary advertising. "Yes," Obama and Pepsi seem to be saying, "we *can*" participate in a plurality as well as articulate individualism at the same time.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Picture of Pepsi can with new 2009 Pepsi logo. Photo used with permission from <francisanderson.wordpress.com>.

Figure 2. Original Pepsi logo.

Figure 3. First Pepsi logo with symbol. Photo used with permission from
<www.vintagedirectdepot.com>.

Figure 4. Previous Pepsi logo before 2009.

Figure 5. Barack Obama's campaign logo.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Vintage Depot Direct CT05



Figure 4



Figure 5



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