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MSc in Politics and Communications

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Negativity and Australian political discourse: a case study of the Australian Liberal Party's 2013 Election television advertising

Clare Creegan

ABSTRACT

The 2013 Australian Federal Election Campaign was intensely negative (Holmes, 2014). While much has been written on the prevalence and effects of negative campaigning (Iyengar and Simon, 2000; Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995), there has been little work on how negativity is constructed. This dissertation examines how negativity is constructed in contemporary political discourse. It aims to contribute to existing literature on negativity in political campaigning, and expand this in relation to discourse. It sets out to provide recommendations for political theorists and practitioners, particularly in Australia, where there has been little research on this subject to date. This research is framed using a case study of the 2013 Australian Federal Election Campaign, looking specifically at selected 'negative' television advertisements – as classified by advertising monitor Ebiquity (Ebiquity, 2013) – produced by the Australian Liberal Party. Political television advertising was selected as the focus of this research, as a unique form of political communication (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 6) and the main source of information for Australian voters (Schmitt-Beck and Farrell, 2002: 11).

What constitutes a 'negative advertisement' is subject to debate, but it is clear that discourse is central to the construction of negativity. This is important because discourse acts to create meaning and understanding (Horvath, 2009: 45), and has real world consequences, including shaping perceptions of reality, altering or maintaining power relations (Foucault, 1978), and manufacturing consent (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Accordingly, it can influence election outcomes and civic culture (Hall, 1988). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to examine how the selected advertisements (the Texts) interact with wider social trends and structures (Fairclough, 1993). While CDA does not explore audiences or effects, it can reveal how specific actors (in this case the Australian Liberal Party) seek to construct arguments and how these fit with the broader social context. Results suggest negativity is constructed through the use of specific words, sounds and images, and the interaction of these features with a particular context, which has implications for politics and, more broadly, democracy.

INTRODUCTION

'Australians play politics like they play sport. Ruthlessly, and to win.'

(John McTernan, Communications Director to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, quoted in Hayes 2013)

The 2013 Australian Federal Election marked the culmination of a remarkable period in Australian politics. The Election resulted in the dismissal of the Labour-led minority government, the Australian Liberal Party winning an outright majority in the House of Representatives with 90 seats, and the conferral of Liberal discourse (Taylor, 2013). Negativity in Australian political campaigning is 'nothing new' (Plasser, 2002: 347), but the prolonged and relentless negativity evident in the lead-up to Leader Tony Abbott as Prime Minister saw negativity extend beyond advertising to the broader political arena. The 2013 Australian Federal Election (the Election) represented a magnification of this trend and revealed much about contemporary political practices (Holmes, 2014).

While existing research on negative advertising focuses on the categorization of content (negative or positive), effects or transmission, this dissertation seeks to explore the way in which negativity is constructed. In the same way that medical researchers might seek to understand how a disease is transmitted before attempting to develop a treatment, this research examines how negativity is generated in political discourse, with a view to better informing the debate about its role in contemporary political campaigns.

I look specifically at the Australian Liberal Party's 2013 Election Campaign. Three 'negative' advertisements – that is, materials 'critical of an opponent' (Mayer, 1996: 440) – have been selected from a suite of campaign advertisements. These materials fit Mayer's definition and were classified as negative by advertising monitor Ebiquity (2013). The Australian Liberal Party (referred to as the Liberal Party) spent approximately \$6.75 million on television, press and radio advertising in the five weeks leading up to polling day on 7 September 2013 (referred to as the Campaign Period), compared to the Australian Labour Party's (referred to as Labour or the ALP) \$4 million in expenditure over the same period. While both major political parties ran highly professionalised, media-centric, candidate-focused and 'negative' campaigns (Norris, 2002: 132), the Liberal Party put more negative advertisements to air during the Campaign Period (Ebiquity, 2013: 5). The Liberal Party's Campaign provides an interesting case study as, despite its strong electoral position resulting from Labour's unpopularity and instability, the Party still decided to run a negative campaign.

Importantly, the discourse of this Campaign can reveal much about the social context in which it was created. Political campaigns, as ‘organised efforts to inform, persuade, and mobilise’ (Norris, 2002: 3), provide a barometer of prevailing social and cultural trends. Moreover, if one takes the view, as I do in this dissertation, that campaigns are a vital part of the democratic process (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 11), then it follows that campaign discourse has real world consequences for both electoral outcomes and the health of a democracy more generally.

This dissertation focuses on political television advertising, as a crucial form of political discourse (Van Dijk, 1997). Television advertising represents a direct communication between the candidate and voter ‘without any screens or filters’ (Geer, 2006: 21) and is the main medium through which Australians gather information about political candidates (Swanson and Mancini 2006). Televised political advertising in Australia is legal and largely unrestricted (Plasser, 2002), which strengthens its ability to influence voters and elections (Denemark, 2002).

I use Fairclough’s model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how negativity is constructed in the Texts. CDA enables an examination of the way language is deployed to maintain or alter power relations (Fairclough, 1989). It is appropriate for this research as it allows the Texts to be situated in a broader context, with reference to the whole process of social interaction (Horváth, 2009).

While political discourse has been examined in other countries, for example, the examination of the language of New Labour in the United Kingdom (Fairclough, 2000), there has been little examination of discourse in the Australian context, and even less examination of discourses of negativity.

Exploring the discourse of political advertising provides insight into its potential consequences (Iyengar and Simon, 2000). Foremost here is the impact negativity can have on political engagement. As Ansolabehere and Iyengar state: ‘the nasty tone of current political campaigns is widely thought to generate serious political externalities’ (1996: 112). This view appears to be supported by growing levels of voter disengagement in Australia (Thorson, *et al.*, 2000). Although an examination of the specific effects of negative discourse is beyond the scope of this dissertation, in-depth analysis of how negativity is constructed in Australian political discourse is relevant to improving understandings of its broader functions and consequences.

THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL APPROACHES

In this section I explore negativity (as the central concept in this research) with reference to the Australian political context. First though, I outline how the construction of negativity can be understood through discourse. Section 2.1 details: why discourse is important; the specifics of political discourse; political advertising as a form of political discourse; and why television advertising, as a unique form of political discourse, has been selected as the focus of this research.

Literature on negativity is then presented (Section 2.2) in four parts: definition; the theoretical framework – situating negativity with reference to theories of campaign modernisation and post-modernisation (Norris 2002: 132); audience, effects and transmission; and content – with a focus on the construction of negativity through personalisation, direct appeals and negative association. These elements, identified as central to the construction of negativity, inform later analysis of the Texts. Finally, I set the scene for the case study that frames this research with an examination of the Australian context (Section 2.3).

Discourse

Discourse, defined simply, is a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Discourse is significant in its ability to persuade and construct meaning (Van Dijk, 1997). It is also important in what it reveals about the connections between texts and social structures (Foucault, 1978). While discourse is not simply a linguistic concept (Hall, 2001: 72) – it can be articulated through images, sounds and texts (Rose, 2007) – the role of language, as a ‘form of action’ (Fairclough, 1989: 24), is fundamental.

Discourse, as a ‘system of representation’ (Hall, 2001: 72), is not neutral but acts to reproduce or change social structures and power relations (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). It can be used to legitimate ideological positions, construct norms and manufacture consent (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). As Hall states: ‘knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of “the truth” but has the power to make itself true’ (2001: 76). This builds on Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, which suggests the production of meaning can act to naturalise power relations (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 32). The relationship between discourse, power and ideology is contested, with Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe asserting that

discourse is distinct from ideology, while others such as Hall, suggest they are inextricably linked – to the point that ‘ideology becomes reality’ (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 37). While this dissertation takes the position that ideology is distinct from reality, it seeks to explore the complex interplay of these concepts in political discourse.

Discourse theory suggests all objects and actions are meaningful (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000) and that meaning is determined by the specifics of the context. This is significant to this dissertation as it establishes the foundations for the construction of meaning in the Texts. Discourse provides the language to discuss and understand a topic ‘at a particular historical moment’ (Hall, 1997: 44), stressing that the meaning of words is not fixed, but constructed by a system of representation – that is, the relationship between things, concepts and signs (Hall, 1997: 19). Based on this understanding, discourse can be seen as a form of social practice, which: ‘both constitutes the social world and is constituted by other social practices’ (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 61). I will focus on the construction of negativity in discourse – or in Jorgensen and Phillips’ language, the way in which negativity is constituted by other social practices (2002: 61) – and what it can reveal about the environment in which it was produced. Although I focus on how negativity is constituted in the Texts, this analysis is underpinned by the understanding that discourse also constitutes the social world.

What is political discourse?

‘Political discourse’ is a specific genre of discourse. It is often defined with reference to its actors, for example the talk and text of ‘political actors’, such as politicians (Van Dijk, 1997: 12). This conceptualisation, while useful, neglects a range of other actors such as protest groups, issues groups and, importantly, voters. Attempts to develop this definition have focused on the functions, implications and context of the discourse. While there is debate about the precise theoretical boundaries of ‘political discourse’, there is, importantly for this dissertation, broad agreement that political advertising, as a key part of ‘doing politics’ (Van Dijk, 1997: 18) falls within this category.

Political discourse is essential in understanding the relationship between governments and voters as: ‘power is partly discourse, and discourse is partly power’ (Fairclough, 2010: 4). As a struggle for power to pursue certain political, economic and social ideas (Horvath, 2009: 45), politics relies on language. All political activities are made up of text and talk (Van Dijk, 1997) and political differences are constituted as differences in language (Fairclough, 2000: 4). The critical point here is that discourse is not just about words; it shapes ways of thinking and structuring ideas. Taking this a step further, political discourse can therefore be argued to shape the structure of society or, as Laclau and Mouffe express it: ‘politics has primacy’

(Laclau and Mouffe, 1990: 33). Viewed this way, one can understand why Orwell wrote extensively about the capacity of political language to manipulate thought and the potential, in his view problematic, goals of this manipulation (1969: 225).

The specifics of political discourse are situated in the relations between discourse structures and political context structures (Van Dijk, 1997: 24). Political discourse can be considered in relation to:

how it contributes to the governing process (how it achieves consent, for instance), how it represents the social worlds and the political and governmental process itself, and how it projects a particular identity tied to particular values – that is in terms of genre, discourse and style (Fairclough, 2000: 14).

Put simply, political discourse can be characterised by its political function (Wodak, 2001). Aristotle characterised this functionality in terms of decision and deliberation; or an attempt to convince an audience to complete or not complete an action (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). Negative advertising is an interesting example of political discourse as it performs a clear political function in attacking opponents and legitimating or discrediting sources of power (Wodak, 2001).

Much has been written about political discourse, with notable work including Hall's examination of the semiotic construction of Thatcherism (1983), Fairclough's analysis of the language of New Labour (2000) and Horvath's investigation of the discourse of President Obama's speeches (2009). However, there has been little examination of discourse in relation to campaign trends, particularly negativity, and limited analysis of political advertising as a form of political discourse.

Political advertising as a form of political discourse

Political advertising, as the dominant form of communication between politicians and voters (Kaid 1997), represents a key form of political discourse. Unlike other forms of political discourse, such as debates or interviews, advertising is a precise and deliberate presentation of campaign messages.

Election advertising is a key part of political communication, that is, the interactive process that constructs reality for voters (Swanson, 1991: 11). This form of advertising has distinctive discourses and practices built around political goals, in this case to promote beliefs or candidates with a view to winning a majority of seats in the Australian Parliament (Schmitt-

Beck and Farrell, 2002: 3). While the effects of political advertising are debated (Holbrook, 1996: 6), it represents: 'the clearest evidence of how parties / candidates *choose to present themselves* to the mass of voters [emphasis added],' (Scammell, 2006: 4).

Political advertising, as a specific form of discourse, seeks to persuade by fixing 'the identities of objects and practices' (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 3). All political advertising, positive or negative, is designed to: 'manipulate societal myths, icons, public and private symbols by visual and aural editing techniques to form "the message"' (Kendall, 1995: 180). This relies on a field of existing knowledge and understanding among voters (Van Dijk, 1993: 250) to facilitate the transfer of 'visual and textual signifieds' (Rose, 2001: 89) to the political candidate, party or opponent.

Materials follow a precise format to facilitate this transfer, exhibit power and influence audiences (Van Dijk, 1993: 259). Access, setting, genre and participant positions are carefully controlled (Van Dijk, 2000: 309), as such features like the length, format and language used can reveal much about the context in which they were produced. Language is deliberately composed to construct ideological and political differences (Fairclough, 2000: 4).

Political advertising acts not only to influence voter decisions, but can also play an 'agenda setting' role by influencing the topics considered by voters and the media (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 93); a 'priming' role in determining the issues that are used by voters to assess the performance of parties or candidates (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987); and a 'framing' role by defining the context and call to action to serve the arguers' interests (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 93). This framing, agenda setting and priming, in and of discourse, is significant as it can influence public opinion, and consequently, shape government decisions (Wodak, 2001: 68).

While political advertising takes a variety of forms, this research focuses on television advertising, because of its central role in Australian political campaigning.

Why look at television advertising?

Political television advertising represents a direct, unmediated communication between the candidate and voter (Geer, 2006: 21). It is considered a 'potent weapon' (Ansolabehere, 1993: 179) in political campaigning and, while the precise effects are debated, it has been proven to educate, influence and persuade (Ansolabehere, 1993: 182). Importantly, it has also been found to shape voter decisions (Schmitt-Beck and Farrell, 2002: 3).

Facilitated by the development of commercial television from the 1950s, political television advertising has had pronounced effects on the way voters engage with candidates and parties – one of the most noticeable being how the format of television advertisements has changed the way political actors seek to communicate, with messages usually structured as 30-second presentations due to cost and effectiveness considerations (Iyengar and Simon, 2000: 154). Television advertising is a particularly important aspect of political campaigning in Australia (Denemark, 2002: 669).

The discourse (words, sounds and images) of television advertising can reveal much about the context and practices involved in their production (Horvath, 2009: 45). Further, it can help to understand how political actors seek to use specific discourses (in this case negativity, as explored further below) to achieve particular objectives.

Negativity

Definitions

Negativity is a key feature of contemporary political campaigns. Negative campaigning, although a highly subjective concept, can be defined as ‘any criticism levelled by one candidate against another during a campaign’ (Geer, 2006: 23). It is any material that ‘targets the attacked candidate’s weakness in issues or image and highlights the sponsoring candidate’s strengths’ (Hughes, 2003: 164). A dominant form of this is negative television advertising, a central feature of political campaigning since the emergence of televised political advertising in the mid-20th century in the United States (Ansolabehere, 1993: 87).

The role and implications of negativity, in particular negative advertising, depend on how democracy is understood. Democracy, for the purpose of this dissertation, is defined according to the participatory model, which stresses the importance of citizen engagement and participation (Freedman, Franz and Goldstein, 2004: 723) in other civic activities beyond voting (Scammell, 2000: XLI). This model was selected as it reflects the ideals, if not the reality, of the Australian system (Schumpeter, 1976: 285). The understanding of democracy is important as it sets the parameters in which to consider the potential effects of negative advertising.

Most research on negative advertising focuses on frequency, tone or effectiveness (Carraro and Castelli, 2010: 621), but this does not help to understand how negativity is constructed. I seek to explore the construction of negativity in political advertising, which requires an

examination of discourse in totality (Mayer, 1996). This analysis is situated in a specific theoretical framework, as detailed below.

Theoretical framework

Developments in political campaigning, in particular the role of television advertising and negativity, can be understood through theories of campaign modernisation and post-modernisation. These theories describe the convergence of complex cultural and social trends, such as modernisation and globalisation, and their application to political campaigning (Tomlinson, 1991; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). While the theory of campaign modernisation emphasises the role of the media, personalisation, professionalization, and commercialisation (Norris, 2002: 132), campaign post-modernisation attempts to explain 'post-modern' changes in the media and social environment (Giddens, 1991: 27). Post-modern campaigns are characterised by a continued (and heightened) focus on candidate image, news management, spin, permanent campaigning and, importantly for this research, negativity (Plasser, 2002: 35).

For the purpose of this dissertation I refer to modernisation and post-modernisation simply as 'campaign trends', on the basis that elements of these theories are not mutually exclusive or linear in development (Norris, 2002). Indeed, I suggest selected components of both theories are present in Australian political campaigns and are relevant to the construction of negativity. For example, personalisation is closely linked to negativity (Norris, 2000: 10), as is the media-centric environment in which political campaigns operate in Australia. These campaign theories, rather than 'Americanisation' – the idea that political marketing techniques pioneered in the United States are being proliferated around the world (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 26) – are used in recognition of the local particularities of Australian political campaigning (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 6). With negativity situated within this theoretical framework, considerations related to the audience, effects and transmission of negative advertising are outlined below to foreshadow the importance of this research.

Audience and effects

While the 'effects' of negative advertising are much debated, political candidates use it because they believe it can work. Advertising effects, audience and transmission will not be explored as part of the analysis of the Texts, but these considerations are detailed briefly below as an important part of the broader context.

Negative advertising has wide-ranging effects in political campaigning. It can deliver short-term informational benefits (Held, 2006: 18) and is influential, especially for undecided and

less politically informed voters (Freedman, Franz and Goldstein, 2004: 734). It has also been found to be more memorable (Gibson, 2013) and persuasive than positive alternatives (Geer, 2006: 52). While negative advertising is generally disliked, research suggests it can help voters to learn about the candidates and issues (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland, 1991) and enhance participation and political involvement (Stevens, 2009: 437).

Perceived effectiveness and reception can vary based on a range of factors, from a candidate's gender to political status (Kaid, 2004: 177). For non-incumbents, negative advertisements can be 'game-changers or game-deciders' (Craig, *et al.*, 2012: 4). Negative advertising can weaken the voter's opinion of both the subject and the proponent of the negative attack (Ansolabehere, *et al.*, 1994: 834), which raises broader considerations about its impact on 'public mood' (Thorson, *et al.*, 2000: 18). It can also foster cynicism (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995: 103) and make voters: 'dislike politicians, dislike voting, and perhaps even dislike the entire business of politics altogether' (Brooks, 2006: 686).

Understandings of voter decision-making processes vary according to the model and assumptions used. Audiences are not homogenous and, as such, responses to campaign messages and advertisements are not uniform (O'Cass, 2002: 72). Individual viewers – referred to interchangeably in this dissertation as voters – respond emotionally to advertisements (Scammell and Langer, 2006: 781) and have clear ideas of when advertising has 'crossed the line of fairness' (Johnson, 2007: 84). Audiences report a preference for content that is relevant, credible, accurate and 'comparative' rather than 'attacking' (Hughes, 2003: 164). This dissertation stresses the agency of audience, and recognises that political advertisements do not 'carry' meaning but rather 'evoke' meaning, as determined by the individual viewer (Biocca, 1991).

In addition to these variations in audience and effects, negative advertising should also be considered with reference to transmission. How negative messages are broadcast can shape how voters respond. The leading medium for negative advertising and the focus of this dissertation is television – a distinctive and essential tool in political communication (Denemark, 2002: 669). Strategists draw on effectiveness studies and campaign orthodoxies in deciding how to 'schedule' negative messages. Foremost here is volume, with the more advertisements the more effective (Stevens, 2009: 429), subject to the caveat that negative advertisements are thought to work better when outnumbered by positive advertisements (Mayer, 1996: 443). Advertisements are also considered more memorable when delivered closer to Election Day (Krupnikov, 2011: 797), although parties usually attempt to use more positive messaging in the final stages of a campaign. A somewhat more nuanced or subjective

factor is the role of the context of broadcast. This dissertation focuses on the Campaign Period (as outlined earlier), but recognises advertisements aired outside this time are important in framing issues, priming audiences and creating shared understandings. In addition to these considerations, content is central to the construction of negative advertising, as outlined below.

Content and construction

Negative advertising refers to a range of materials that vary in content, aim and tone (Stevens, *et al.*, 2008: 530). It can be used to achieve different political or campaign goals, including: strengthening recall or association of a negative message with a particular candidate (Hughes, 2003: 166); comparing and contrasting parties and candidates (O’Cass, 2002: 64); providing ‘important’ details about a candidate (Mayer, 1996: 441); or discrediting an opponent (Krupnikov, 2011: 798). Content can vary widely, from materials that attack an opponent personally, to those that point out flaws in a policy or decision. Distinctions in terms of negative advertising content can be made with reference to truth, relevance, or civility (Mayer, 1996: 443), or according to the focus of the attack: ideological; personal; or policy / political (Carraro and Castelli, 2010: 621). These ‘blunt’ (Scammell and Langer, 2006: 763) categories are useful, but many advertisements blur these distinctions.

There are a number of elements that, while not categorically constitutive of negative advertising materials, are often present in negative advertisements. These include: personalisation; direct appeals to the voter to provoke a particular ‘negative’ response; and negative framing and association. These characteristics are used in this dissertation to structure the examination of negativity in the Texts. Personalisation – that is, the focus on candidate or leader image or personality, rather than policy or Party (Pinkleton, 1997) – is identified in the Texts through references to the leader or candidate and personal attacks or criticism. Direct appeals to the voter to provoke a particular ‘negative’ response, such as fear or anxiety, are identified in the Texts through the use of textual, visual and audio techniques aimed at encouraging the viewer to reach a negative conclusion about a candidate or party. While it is clear all discourses attempt to generate a particular response, this form of appeal is distinguished by its ‘negative’ focus. Finally, negative framing and association is identified in the Texts through attempts to directly link the candidate or leader with a particular problem or unpopular issue. This can be achieved through various visual, audio and textual devices (Young, 2003: 311). Analysis of the Texts aims to identify how these features are established and how they interact to construct negativity. First though, the Australian context is outlined briefly to set the scene for the case study.

The Australian context

Political and media context

As outlined in the introduction, Australian political campaigns appear to reflect campaign modernisation trends particularly professionalization, personalisation and negativity. Negative advertising in this context should be considered with reference to a unique combination of structural factors, including Australia's majoritarian party-based Parliamentary system, compulsory preferential voting, legalised television advertising and unrestricted campaign spending (Forrest and Marks, 1999: 100). Compulsory voting requires all eligible individuals (even those less engaged or informed) to attend a polling place on Election Day and cast a vote, although they can submit an informal ballot. This voids one of the main criticisms in relation to negative advertising – its impact on voter turnout and participation (AEC, 2006: 13). As such, Australian political advertising can focus on appealing to voters to maximise votes and pursue electoral success – in this case defined by winning a majority of seats (Schmitt-Beck and Farrell, 2002: 14) – rather than seeking to encourage participation, as is often the focus of advertising in other jurisdictions.

The preferential voting system means a small number of 'marginal' electorates can essentially determine the outcome of the Election (McAllister, 2002). Marginal electorates are those that require less than a 5 per cent swing to change party (Young, 2003: 86). There is no restriction on the amount that can be spent on advertising in a particular electorate and research suggests the party that spends the most in a particular electorate will usually win the most votes (Forrest and Marks, 1999: 100). As such, parties often target resources in these marginal seats (Plasser, 2002: 111).

Political campaigns in Australia, as in many democracies around the world, are increasingly shaped to respond to the needs and interests of the media (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 11). While media and communication have always been central to politics and political campaigning (Stromback, 2008: 229), media are now the dominant source of political intelligence for voters in Australia (Jaensch, 1995). This situation, where media (noting 'the media' refers to a diverse range of actors, rather than a uniform actor) represent the most important source of information, is referred to as 'mediation' (Giddens, 1991). In this context, candidates and leaders are required to perform as media personalities (Fairclough, 2000: 3), making communicative style central to 'political success or failure' (Fairclough, 2000: 4).

Negative advertising

A number of features, such as compulsory voting, legalised political television advertising and the changing media landscape, contribute to an environment that facilitates, or fails to inhibit, negativity in Australian political advertising (Forrest and Marks, 1999), as detailed above. In this section I outline the particulars of the Liberal Party's negative advertising during the Election Campaign.

Close to half of the Liberal Party's television advertising in the final week of the Campaign Period were classified as negative (Ebiquity, 2013). The Party's campaign strategy focused on discrediting the ALP and promoting instability in the minority Parliament (Taylor, 2013). Both major parties' campaign strategies targeted marginal seats, a feature that while not unusual in Australian political campaigning (Ward, 2003: 588), is increasingly pronounced with declining party loyalty and greater voter volatility (Negrine, 2008: 160). More than 40 per cent of Australian voters remain undecided in the final weeks of any election campaign (McAllister, 2002: 26) and these 'undecided' voters, particularly in marginal seats, can determine the Election outcome (Jamieson, 2000: 11). This is not to suggest that all voters in marginal seats are undecided, but explains why they may be targeted. In this context, negative advertising can be considered 'necessary and legitimate' (Mayer, 1996: 440) as it offers more benefits than risks (Jamieson, 2000: 11).

Negative advertising, however, has potential broader implications for civic engagement. It has been cited as a factor in Australian voters becoming increasingly disengaged and cynical towards politics (Thorson *et al.*, 2000: 19) which, viewed through a participatory model of democracy, has serious implications.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

This section draws on the literature outlined above to develop a conceptual framework to guide the CDA. I have so far outlined the concept of negativity, with reference to the Australian context. Further, I have detailed the importance of political discourse, locating television political advertising as a specific form of political discourse, in what it can reveal about the context in which Texts were produced. I now operationalise these concepts to assess how negativity is constructed in the Texts.

Research Objectives

Through this analysis, I explore how negativity is constructed in Australian political discourse. While some work has been done on the discourse of political advertising, CDA of political television advertisements is not common (Geis, 1987) and there has been limited examination of discourse for the construction of negativity, particularly in the Australian context.

This dissertation aims to contribute to existing literature on negativity and campaign trends, and expand understandings of these trends in relation to political discourse. It sets out to provide recommendations for political theorists and practitioners, particularly in Australia where there has been limited research in this area to date.

This research is timely, as Australian voters have reported declining trust in government and greater political cynicism (Jones and Pusey 2008: 586), a sentiment associated, in part, with negative advertising (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995: 103; Norris, 2002: 129). Campaign trends and changes in political campaigning raise important questions about the 'nature and future' (Swanson and Manchini, 1996: 2) of democracy. As such, this dissertation explores the construction of negativity in political discourse and considers this with reference to broader implications for Australian politics and democracy.

Research questions

This research is structured to address the overarching issue of how negativity is constructed in Australian political discourse, using selected television advertisements from the 2013 Election Campaign. This can be abstracted through a series of research questions (RQs), outlined below:

RQ1: How does discourse practice act to construct negativity in the Texts?

RQ2: How do text, visuals and audio act to construct negativity in the Texts?

RQ3: How does the social context act to construct negativity in the Texts?

RQ4: How do these features interact to construct negativity in the Texts?

Data selection

The Australian Liberal Party's 2013 Election television advertisements (the Texts) have been selected as a case study for this research. Three advertisements were transcribed for analysis: Trail of Disaster (Sample 1), which outlines the perceived failures of the Labour Party and Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister; Captain Chaos is back (Sample 2), which similarly attacks Labour's record in Government; and Labour Green Spring Clean (Sample 3), which presents the apparent risks of a Labour-Green alliance Government. These advertisements were selected as products of the most recent Australian Election campaign, produced by the 'winning' Party – based on the attainment of the majority of seats (Schmitt-Beck and Farrell, 2002: 14). They were also the most frequently broadcast 'negative' Liberal Party advertisements in the Campaign Period, as classified by advertising monitor Ebiquity (2013: 5).

The Texts reflect the main themes and messaging used by the Liberal Party in the Campaign, making them relevant to the phenomenon of interest (Wood and Kroger, 2000: 78), negativity in Australian political discourse. Further, as the Party now in Government, the discourse of these Texts can be considered in relation to current political actions and decisions. I do not suggest that these Texts are representative of all political advertisements or views, but rather that they are valuable as a purposive selection of materials that speak to broader trends in contemporary Australian political discourse.

Analytical framework

This research utilises Fairclough's model of CDA, which emphasises the dynamics of power and knowledge in discourse, to consider the construction of negativity. CDA is more than the analysis of language. It facilitates the investigation of discourse practices (how text is produced and received) and sociocultural practices (the institutional and social frameworks in which the text occurs) associated with texts, in addition to the text itself (Fairclough, 1995b: 16). In essence, it is an interdisciplinary method that aims to understand social questions rather than linguistic ones (Young, 2003: 123).

Approaches to discourse analysis are not homogeneous (Van Dijk, 1993), with academics like Fairclough, Wodak, Van Dijk and Chilton all offering slightly different methods. Fairclough's model has been adopted for this research as it enables analysis of the:

often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practice, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes (Fairclough, 1993: 135).

This ‘opacity’ can act to legitimise power relations and create particular truths (Fairclough, 1989: 41), and as such it forms the main focus of CDA.

CDA recognises all discourse as meaningful (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 2), but emphasises that meanings are not fixed (Hall 1997: 44), rather that ‘all discourse is occasioned’ (Gill, 1996: 141). It views language as a form of social practice and action (Halliday, 1978). In using CDA, this dissertation adopts the basic social constructivist theoretical premises of the method (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 4). This method, rather than a non-critical approach, is appropriate for this research in its emphasis on power and potential social effects (Fairclough, 1992: 12).

This dissertation recognises the criticism that CDA can be influenced by researcher biases (Widdowson, 1995). While acknowledging that CDA is by its nature ‘subjective’ (Hall, 2001: 73), I attempt to mitigate any personal biases by distancing myself from pre-existing understandings of the materials. I recognise that, ethically and practically, familiarity with the style and genre based on my experience as a political staffer in Australia and a political science student makes it more difficult to examine texts as ‘socially constructed meaning-systems’ (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 21).

The development of a detailed, replicable coding framework (available at Appendix A) attempts to minimise any perceived biases and strengthen rigor and transparency. I do not attempt to draw generalizable conclusions from the analysis of discourse, but rather conduct an in-depth examination of the Texts as materials of interest (Gill, 1996: 156).

Further, there are limitations inherent in the transcription (through the selection or interpretation of the Texts) of the spoken words – for example, silences are not reflected (Fairclough, 1992: 229). Following a pilot project in which CDA was conducted on text only of transcribed television advertisements, this analysis has been expanded to consider ‘other semiotic dimensions’ (Van Dijk, 1995: 18) – such as visual and audio components – which Fairclough recognises as equally important in the construction of meaning (2013: 357). Although images and sound are considered, the transcribed text remains central to this analysis.

Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (1992: 237) emphasises: 1) discourse practice; 2) text (using the term broadly to refer to textual, visual and audio features); and 3) social practice. These dimensions will be explored below, before using research questions based on this framework to present analysis in Section 4.

Discourse practice

Discourse practice refers to the process by which text is produced, distributed and consumed (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 68). It explores the relationship between discourses and genres, which are: 'uses of language associated with particular socially ratified activity types, such as job interviews or scientific papers' (Fairclough, 1993: 135). Political advertising, and negative advertising in particular, can therefore be seen as a specific discourse with links to other genres.

The Texts will be examined to assess the influence of other genres and discourses, or 'interdiscursivity' (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 7), and how they contribute to the construction of negativity. Further, 'intertextuality', which refers to how texts draw on, or are shaped by, elements of other texts (Kristeva, 1986: 39), will be established through examination of the visual and verbal elements (Chouliaraki, 2008).

Text

Discourses are articulated through all sorts of visual, verbal and written forms (Rose, 2001: 142). Analysis of the communication will be divided into *textual elements* and *visual and audio elements*, as detailed below.

Textual elements

Analysis of text, as transcribed, refers to the speech or written characteristics of a communicative event (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 68). Text can be examined with reference to its linguistic and formal features, including: structure; the relationship between speakers, or voice; wording; evidence; and grammar (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 83). These textual features can act to manufacture political consent or legitimate political power (Van Dijk, 2007: 25), as highlighted in the analysis below.

Visual and audio elements

Visual or non-verbal elements, such as images and sound, are central to the way in which television advertising attempts to convey meaning (Norris, 2004: 2). This analysis will explore the use of visuals and audio features to construct negativity in the Texts.

Social practice

An examination of the social practice reveals the relationship between texts and their context, including broader socio-cultural, political, ideological, institutional and historical contexts and structures (Fairclough, 1989). This helps to understand the way in which meaning and knowledge are shaped (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 69).

This analysis will look specifically at the relationship between the Texts and the broader social and political context in Australia to explore how this contributes to the construction of negativity.

Constructing a coding frame

A coding framework was developed to analyse the Texts according to Fairclough's CDA framework (Fairclough, 1992: 237). This framework and annotation of the Texts is available at Appendix A.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Analysis of the Texts is presented below with reference to the four research questions, which are based on Fairclough's CDA framework, outlined above. This analysis focuses on the key elements or indicators of negativity – personalisation; direct appeals; framing and negative association – as outlined in Section 2.2.

RQ1: How does discourse practice act to construct negativity in the Texts?

Discourse practice, or the way in which text is produced, distributed and consumed (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 68), is significant in influencing the construction of meaning and, consequently, negativity in the Texts.

The Texts that form the focus of this research were produced by the Liberal Party and broadcast on Australian commercial television as paid advertising during the 2013 Election campaign. It can be assumed that they reflect the distinctive production techniques of political advertisements, where there is no single creator; rather, they are produced by a range of people including advertising and political professionals, party officials and candidates (Young, 2003: 122). The medium of broadcast, in this case television, can be considered significant in its 'disarticulation and re-articulation' (Chouliaraki, 2008: 685) of discourse, or as Derrida argues, transmission is essential to the construction of meaning

(Derrida, 1976). While this dissertation avoids the temptation to be technologically determinist, it recognises that the medium can influence the message and, consequently, the construction of meaning (this idea is expanded below). The Texts link with the Liberal Party's suite of campaign advertisements, both positive and negative, and complement these with a consistent depiction of Rudd as incompetent and focus on selected policy issues (Hall, 2001: 73). The Texts are also highly influenced by different genres and discourses, along with elements of other texts (Kristeva, 1986: 39), as detailed below.

The Texts can be situated within the complex institutional matrix of politics and reflect elements of the political genre, including those associated with political parties, parliament, elections, political campaigning and personalisation (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 83). Links with the political genre are established through references to political parties, naming the Labour Party (in all Texts) and the Australian Greens (Sample 3). Parliamentary discourse, as an element of the political genre, is constructed through references to Leadership, legislation and policy decisions. Elections and political campaigning discourse is highlighted through the content, references to polling day (Sample 3) and through the advertisement structures, for example using the required Australian Electoral Commission authorisation (present in all Texts). Finally, personalisation is reflected through the focus on candidate image, in this case Labour Leader Kevin Rudd, whom the Texts position as the opponent.

The Texts are highly interdiscursive, with linkages to a range of genres – that is, 'uses of language associated with particular socially ratified activity types' (Fairclough, 1993: 135) and discourses beyond the political sphere. Interdiscursive links with management and economic genres are evident in the Texts. These are used in an attempt to construct negativity in the Texts through the framing of competence and effectiveness (management genre) and emphasising the opponent's economic record (Young, 2003: 319) or economic consequences if the opponent were elected (economics / budget genre). Economic and management genres are highlighted through references to Government expenditure and budget (Sample 1, paragraph 2), and references to 'failure' (Sample 1, paragraph 7), implying Rudd is not an appropriate 'manager' of the nation. This 'interdiscursivity' acts to shape 'truths' in relation to the Rudd Government and, by extension, infer that the Liberal Party is better placed to govern.

The Texts also display interdiscursive links to the advertising genre. Political advertising is positioned at the intersection of advertising, media and political genres (Tahmasbi and Kalkhajeh, 2013: 126). This influence of the advertising genre, or more specifically the

television advertising genre, is highlighted through the format. The Texts are brief, standardised in length (15, 30 or 60 seconds) and aim to convey as much information in the least amount of time possible (given the cost of airing commercials). This acts to shape the way information is presented and enable a focus on negative messages, which are considered more memorable (Geer, 2006: 52). The structure of the Texts also reflects the influence of the medium on the way a message is framed and presented, as alluded to earlier.

Political materials are often constructed with reference or in response to other political materials, particularly the discourses of opponents or other political actors and other materials produced by the Party (Fairclough, 2000: 15). For example, the Texts echo the policy priorities outlined by the Liberal Party in online, printed and other broadcast election materials. This is highlighted through the use of intertextual references to communicate information and evoke particular responses from viewers. References to other political texts highlight particular issues and build on existing views or concerns, for example, referring to leadership changes and disunity in the Labour Party (Sample 1, paragraph 6), which draws intertextual links to media coverage and other texts that explore this issue.

RQ2: How do audio, text and visuals act to construct negativity in the Texts?

The Texts use visual, audio and written forms (Rose, 2007: 142) to construct negativity, as presented below.

Textual elements

Textual tools or patterns, including: structure; voice; wording; evidence; and grammar (Gill, 1996: 143) are used to construct negativity in the Texts. These features are explored with reference to the indicators of negativity – personalization; direct appeals; and negative framing or association – as outlined earlier.

Discourse structure can be used to enact, confirm, legitimise, reproduce or challenge ideological and historical issues (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 271). These structures are significant in political discourse as they make ‘meanings more or less prominent for obvious partisan reasons’ (Van Dijk, 1997: 29). Samples 1 and 2 use argumentation structures to organise the political dispute and create a case against the Government. Each of the Texts begin with an assertion designed to capture the viewer’s attention, for example: ‘in just 31 days...’ (Sample 1, paragraph 1) or ‘this Saturday, take a good look...’ (Sample 3, paragraph 1) and end with a call to action or statement for reflection, for example: ‘this Election, have a

Labour Greens spring clean' (Sample 3, paragraph 3) or 'imagine three more years of Labour failure' (Samples 1 and 2, paragraph 7). The body of the Texts is used to present information and mount an argument to discredit the Labour Party.

The particulars of the structure can also reflect or influence the intended use of the materials. For example, a 15 second advertisement (Sample 3) is likely to be repeated several times in a commercial break and is often used for simple call-to-action messages, building on earlier argumentative advertisements. This structure can be seen to facilitate the emphasis on negativity, through an attempt to quickly create negative association, frame the debate or prompt recall of negative aspects of particular Leaders or parties. The 60 second Text (Sample 2) provides more detail and seeks to justify claims against the Labour Party, which are used in various materials.

Structure, along with grammatical tools, can be used to construct personalisation and negative association. This is established through direct references to Kevin Rudd (Samples 1 and 2); the use of the term 'he' (Sample 2, paragraph 3); and personalised modality, for example: 'he's admitting a \$33 billion dollar budget blowout' (Sample 1, paragraph 3). The categorical modality 'Kevin Rudd's hit' (Sample 1, paragraph 2) aims to establish these statements as self-evident, while asserting and reinforcing the Liberal Party's authority (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). Modality is used to link Kevin Rudd and the Labour Party and construct negative association, while also highlighting separation between Rudd and the Party to emphasise internal divisions: '*he's divided the Labour Party* again [emphasis added]' (Sample 2, paragraph 6). These grammatical tools (Van Dijk, 1997) act to associate perceived policy failures of the Labour Government with Kevin Rudd and highlight Labour's internal fractures.

The Texts use grammatical tools to construct the Labour Party as the political 'other'. For example: 'he's admitting a \$33 billion budget blowout' (Sample 1, paragraph 3). The choice of syntax, particularly pronouns, constructs 'the paradigmatic pair denoting political polarisation' (Van Dijk, 1997: 33) – for example, 'he' (Sample 2, paragraph 3) and 'his' (Sample 2, paragraph 5). This is in contrast to the political plural 'we' (Sample 2, paragraph 2), used to position the viewer with the Liberal Party and create a sense of unity in opposition to the Labour Party. Sample 3 does not use 'we' or 'they' but refers directly to the ALP and Greens, positioning those Parties and the related minority government as a 'big problem' (Sample 3, paragraph 2). The distinction in voice is critical as it positions viewers as the 'object' or 'subject' of external forces, while the narrator is constructed as the 'agent', who has

control and power (Wodak and Meyer, 2001: 102), presenting the Liberal Party as an authoritative source.

These devices are emphasised through repetition. For example, the repetition of 'he' (Sample 2) reinforces the construction the Labour Party as the 'other'. Repetition is used to create a sense of momentum and compound the perception of failure when referring to Labour's action. For example, repetition of the phrase 'all this chaos' (Sample 1, paragraphs 1 and 6), and the repetition of numbers, are used to illustrate the scale of the Labour's problems (Sample 1 and 2) and emphasise these words or phrases. This supports the Liberal Party's attempts to construct preferred meanings (Van Dijk, 1997: 35) or create or confirm negative assessments of Labour's failings in Government, particularly regarding its ability to manage the Budget. Repetition, as a structural and rhetorical device, also supports priming, framing and association, which contribute to the construction of negativity in the Texts.

Negativity is also constructed in the Texts through the use of 'evidence'. The presentation of evidence aims to discredit the Labour Party, naturalise criticisms of Labour and frame certain statements as 'fact' or 'common sense'. This is achieved by using facts or information to support claims against the Government, for example: 'Labour splurges another \$9.2 billion' (Sample 1, paragraph 4). This acts to build on existing uncertainties or anxieties, a key device in negative association (Young, 2003: 397). Another technique used to construct evidence is reported speech (Wilson, 2001: 403), which attributes statements to assign blame or responsibility – for example, 'he's admitting a \$33 billion budget blowout,' (Sample 1, paragraph 3). The Liberal Party uses 'facts' to validate criticism of Labour and support attempts, through its assumed authority, to make these statements 'true' for voters (Hall, 2001: 76).

Wording is used to construct meaning. Words such as 'failure', 'chaos', 'mess' (Sample 1) and 'disaster' (Sample 2) are used to describe the Labour Government. Wording is significant in creating a sense of disunity, with a series of negative verbs including 'wasted' (Sample 2, paragraph 2), 'dismantled' (Sample 2, paragraph 3), 'attacked' (Sample 2, paragraph 4) and 'driven up' [the cost of living] (Sample 2, paragraph 5). The Texts use language to portray a sense of urgency and a need for change: 'all this chaos in just 31 days' (Sample 1, paragraph 6). Wording can also construct identities, as reflected in Sample 1 which attempts to depict Kevin Rudd as incompetent: 'his PNG and Naru deals are a Ruddy mess' (Sample 1, paragraph 5).

Words are also significant beyond their actual utterance and meaning is not fixed (Hall, 1997: 21). This is highlighted with the use of the term 'Ruddy' in Sample 1, which takes on a different the meaning when used in the context: 'it's a Ruddy mess'. Rather than being understood according to its dictionary definition as 'a rosy glow' (Oxford Dictionary, 2013), it is used as a pejorative reference to Kevin Rudd's nickname 'Ruddy' and a euphemism for the expletive 'bloody'. This can be seen to mock and belittle Rudd and the Labour Party. Further, the term 'Captain Chaos' acts not only to deride Rudd, but makes intertextual references to a negative characterisation of his first term as Prime Minister, published in *The Australian* newspaper in 2008 (Lyons, 2008).

The lexical choice also acts to construct particular 'truths' and prime viewers to respond in certain ways on selected issues. This is particularly evident with the use of loaded 'political language' (Herman, 1992) in the Texts, such as 'boat people' (Sample 1, paragraph 5). This choice of language supports the Liberal Party's immigration agenda and acts to dehumanise or delegitimise people seeking asylum. The use of the metaphor 'flooding in' (Sample 1, paragraph 5) to describe the boat arrivals functions to create a sense of unstoppable force or invasion. This acts to construct a racist and anti-immigration discourse and contributes to public opinion on the matter – which, in turn, legitimates political decisions taken to support this policy agenda (Van Dijk, 1997: 40). As Hall states: 'knowledge linked to power... has the power to make itself true' (Hall, 2001: 76). This also applies to the phrasing used in relation to the 'carbon tax' (Samples 1 and 2) and 'mining tax' (Samples 1 and 2), which presents a particular (negative) understanding and acted to redefine these key Government policies (Rolfe, 2013). The 'economic' focus of the Texts reflects the Liberal Party's attempt to set the policy agenda in its favour, reflecting the belief that economic matters are an area of perceived political strength for the Liberal Party.

References to Kevin Rudd in Samples 1 and 2 support the construction of personalisation and associate Rudd directly with issues that the Liberal Party seeks to present negatively or as Labour's policy 'failures'. While Rudd is named in the Texts, these references are accompanied by mentions of the Labour Party, suggesting a distinctive expression of personalization in this Campaign context. The Texts refer directly to Kevin Rudd but do not mention Tony Abbott or the Liberal Party by name – other than in the Party authorisation, which is a legal requirement (AEC, 2013) – possibly to distance Abbott and the Party from the negativity during this period.

These textual tools taken together act to evoke meaning, namely, emphasising particular issues or identities, appealing directly to the voter, assigning responsibility or associating the

opponent with a particular issue or emotion to engender specific negative responses. The overwhelming representation of the Labour Party is negative, with both the Party and Kevin Rudd depicted as incompetent. Language is used to construct political and ideological differences. Further, the Texts use language in an attempt to create prevailing ideologies in relation to the Labour Party and support the Liberal Party's approach to selected policy issues, such as race and economics.

Visual and audio elements

Images and sound are crucial components of television advertising (Rose, 2007: 142). The construction of negativity is often attempted through the recoloring of footage; distortion of images; focus on unflattering facial images (such as an image of an opponent smirking or frowning) or audio; and repetition of images or footage (Young, 2013: 311). These techniques are used in the Texts, as highlighted with the distortion of the ALP logo (used in all Texts). The logo is modified to depict fracture lines through the main visual element of the design. This acts to undermine the Labour Party's brand, present the Party negatively and highlight internal factional divisions or fractures.

Sample 1 deploys visual techniques to create a sense of chaos and disorder through the use of a series of rapidly transitioning, multi-directional tiled images. All images in Sample 1 are of Rudd, with the exception of a single asylum seekers boat image, which acts to associate Rudd directly with this political 'problem'. In Sample 2, the predominant images are of Rudd, using a series of still images (rather than moving footage) to present him as static and inert. This visual device reflects criticism of the Labour Government as 'all talk' (Sample 2, paragraph 7). This builds on a characterisation of Rudd's first term as Prime Minister (PM), offered publicly by members of the Labour Caucus (including former PM Julia Gillard), as a Government 'paralysed' by indecision and inaction (Haynes, 2013). These depictions of the Government as simultaneously chaotic and inactive reflect attempts by the Liberal Party to present the Labour Party to voters as confused and confusing.

Images contribute to the construction of personalisation and the association of Rudd directly with 'negative' messages presented in the corresponding audio and printed text (Samples 1 and 2). The pictures selected present Rudd as feeble, callous or bad-tempered, supporting the construction of negativity (when combined with the spoken messages) and the Liberal Party's narrative of ALP leadership incompetence. The use of formal media images acts to give the pictures and the associated spoken and written messages more credibility. It also invites the viewer to draw intertextual links to related media coverage (for example using images from leaked video footage of Rudd becoming irate while filming a set-piece), which received

extensive coverage and prompted public questioning of Rudd's character (Holmes, 2014). Text printed on screen aligns with the spoken words, serving to reinforce these messages and link issues directly with Rudd. This is evident in Sample 2, where spoken words are replicated in text. Sample 2 uses the preface 'Fact' before each written statement, a presentational device designed to construct the Liberal Party's version of events as truthful and correct. Again in Sample 2, the scrolling text acts to create a sense of relentlessness and to associate this with Rudd and Labour's 'failures'.

Voice (which can be considered as both a textual and audio feature) is determined through the use of a narrator, which reflects strict interaction control (Van Dijk, 1993: 260), reinforcing the power of the narrator and therefore the Liberal Party. Each of the Texts uses a strong male voice as narrator. This may have been selected to correspond with a perception of how 'ordinary' Australians speak, in contrast to Rudd's more polished and sophisticated diction. The style of narration supports the Liberal Party's attempts to position Rudd as out-of-touch with voters, particularly 'ordinary' Australians (who the Liberal Party believes to be well represented in marginal seats). In Sample 1, the narrator speaks in short, exasperated sentences conveying impatience with the Government's perceived failures. This presentation and the speed of delivery encourage the viewer to see Labour's actions as intolerable and overwhelming. Background music is used to create a sense of unease, foreboding or impatience. These audio and visual components further support the construction of negativity in the Texts.

RQ3: How does the social context act to construct negativity in the Texts?

The construction of negativity can be understood with reference to the wider social context in which the Texts were located, or the social practice (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). The Texts are part of a political advertising network of discourse, situated in a system of integrated mass communications and political practices. While the global context is important, Australia's specific social, economic and political structures should also be considered, as a multi-party representative Parliamentary democracy, where television advertising is a standard part of political campaigning.

The Australian media landscape has been shaped by global trends, including commercialisation, technological advancements and the emergence of the 24-hour news cycle (Patterson, 1993: 253). In this context, television advertising is a fundamental part of the media landscape. The Texts can be considered in relation to Australia's highly mediated environment – that is, the process whereby political activities assume the shape and logic of

the media (Jansson, 2002: 14). In this context, media presentations, including negative television advertising, represent key political events (Fairclough, 2000: 6). This can be seen to contribute to, or amplify, the negative tone of political discourse, with perceptions that animosity or acrimony attract more media attention than cooperation and compromise. Although I am careful not to suggest a causal link between technological developments and changes in campaign practices, the relationship between mediatisation and negativity requires greater exploration (Negrine, 2008: 146).

The political context is also vital in understanding attempts to construct meaning in particular ways. The nature of legislative, executive and political institutions can shape the style and substance of politics (McAllister, 2005) and shape 'prevailing official norms, ideologies and attitudes' (Van Dijk, 1997: 40). These considerations are important in situating the Texts in the broader context, as is an understanding of the political goals or objectives being pursued. This political context is reflected in the Texts in various ways. Samples 1 and 2 assume a level of prior knowledge and a shared understanding in relation to Rudd's political record (Sample 2, paragraph 1) and the Labour-Greens minority alliance Government (as outlined in section 2.3). This context is significant in understanding all the Texts, particularly Sample 3, which attempts to construct and exploit a particular 'truth' in relation to the competence of the minority alliance Government. The Texts also emphasise the notion of Labour disunity, for example: 'he's divided the Labour Party again with one third of Cabinet Ministers refusing to work with him' (Sample 2, paragraph 6). The Texts adopt language used by others to criticise Rudd. For example, the term 'chaos' as used in Sample 1, echoing public criticisms of Rudd. These indirect references to internal divisions and leadership instability are significant as a discursive strategy as they aim to confirm existing concerns among voters and construct particular truths in relation to the Labour Party, and then, by comparison, the Liberal Party.

Context is also important to explore the policy issues presented in the Texts. The Liberal Party built its campaign on three main issues: immigration (specifically framed in relation to the arrival of 'boat people'); climate change (framed in opposition to the 'carbon tax'); and the 'mining tax' (again, in its opposition to this Government policy), linking these issues to concerns about rising costs of living and a narrative of Labour incompetence. Attempts by the Liberal Party to focus the political debate on areas of self-identified strength or popularity are reflected in Samples 1 and 2. The issues selected and the way they are framed, for example the reference to 'boat people' (Sample 2, paragraph 3), can be considered with reference to the political context. These issues and associated advertising messages are designed with a particular target audience in mind. The importance of marginal seats to electoral victory, as

outlined in section 2.3, suggests the perceived priorities of voters in these electorates may be relevant to the formulation of campaign messaging. While marginal seats are diverse in composition and location, opinion polls in 2013 suggested voters in key seats in Western Sydney and South East Queensland were concerned about cost of living and about immigration (Rolfe, 2014). These priorities appear to be reflected in the Liberal Party's advertising messaging, through attempts to negatively associate the Labour Party with particular political 'problems' or issues. While I do not suggest that this is the only factor shaping the Liberal Party's messaging, it should be considered as a key consideration. Further, the Liberal Party appears to exploit an assumed shared understanding of its record in Government (from the Howard era) and management of these issues. This is particularly apparent in framing the issue of immigration, with references to the dismantling of 'our border protection policies' (Sample 2, paragraph 3) suggesting these policies were superior to Labour's. The Texts attempt to alter the social practice, through its attempt to challenge the Government, but do so through a conventional use of accepted social practices (political advertising).

The Texts can also be seen to highlight declining party loyalty in Australia (Negrine, 2008: 160). The focus on Rudd through images and text highlights the trend of personalisation (McAllister, 2003: 259). While personalisation appears evident in the Texts, this was tempered by frequent references to the Party (rather than just the leader). This may be explained by the particulars of the political context, with the Liberal Party seeking to capitalise on Labour's low popularity. It may also be specific to this particular leader, as Rudd was not PM for the whole term – therefore, attacks on him alone would seem less credible. Further, Australia's institutional structures act to reinforce the role of parliament and parties (Kavanagh, 1995: 220) and limit the extent of personalisation, particularly compared to presidential systems. Through the use of selected language and issues, the Texts act to draw on existing understandings of the social context, but also to create new understandings of the social context through the construction of particular 'truths'.

RQ4: How do these features interact to construct negativity in the Texts?

This analysis suggests negativity is constructed through a combination of features at the discourse practice, text and social practice levels. These elements contribute to the characteristics that can be seen to constitute negative advertising, including: personalisation; direct appeals to the voter; and negative framing and association (as outlined in section 2.1). Importantly, it is the interaction of these elements in the Texts that act to shape meaning. Personalisation, direct appeals to voters and the production of negative association intersect

through the use of language and visual tools, and, importantly, by building on a shared understanding of the social, historical and political context.

These features, considered in totality, highlight the way actors, in this case the Liberal Party, seek to present a particular argument and evoke meaning from the Texts. This raises questions in relation to the strategies that underpin the use of negative advertising. Viewers are encouraged to draw on other texts and particular understandings of the context or selected issues. Parties seek to use these references to construct meaning, but audiences may also use the same features to construct meaning in ways that counter the goals of the political actor. For example, viewers may still view positive advertisements with reference to negative ones. The interdiscursive and intertextual nature of discourse suggests that a 'negative' message is never to be viewed in isolation. This understanding challenges the scheduling strategies used by parties or candidates, which are often designed to 'move away' from negative advertising at different stages of the campaign (say, for example, the final weeks). While this may be part of the strategy used by political parties to evoke particular meanings, it can act to generate cynicism or disengagement as even positive messages are imbued with elements of negativity.

This dissertation stresses that individual viewers derive their own meaning from texts based on their background, political affiliations, age, race, gender and religion (Brooks 2006: 694). However, the analysis of discourse can reveal how a specific actor seeks to construct an argument. While the actual language of the Texts may not necessarily be negative, when analysed in entirety and with an understanding of the context, a clear political agenda is evident in the Texts – namely, disparaging the Labour Party in an attempt to strengthen the Liberal Party's appeal.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation uses CDA to explore negativity with reference to the discourse of Australian political advertising. Analysis of selected Texts suggests negativity is constructed through language, audio and images – drawing on the specific context to shape meaning and understanding. This is essential in understanding the implications of negativity and associated campaign trends, as all words or images are occasioned (Gill, 1996) and can take on alternative meanings depending on the context.

This research found that the Liberal Party, through the Texts, use a range of audio, visual and textual features to present the Labour Party as incompetent and associate Rudd and the Party

with messages of failure and chaos. This negative association acts to establish shared understandings in relation to certain issues or policies, and seeks to create new 'truths' by framing issues and positioning the viewer to respond in a certain way. The Texts construct and then exploit a set of ideologies and preferred understandings in relation to the Labour Party's record in Government, and use this to build a case for why it should not be re-elected.

The Texts use a range of narrative and visual tools to present the Liberal Party as authoritative and to support its construction of certain statements as 'common sense' (Foucault, 1978). Analysis suggests these appeals can be considered with reference to the target audience, particularly undecided voters in marginal seats, on the basis that political parties seek to target these voters to win the greatest number of seats.

The analysis of discourse also highlights the ability of Texts to not just exploit existing beliefs of ideologies, but to create new 'facts' or 'truths'. This, in turn, can shape social norms and attitudes and affect the way in which publics respond to particular policies or issues. While the nature of CDA means these findings are not generalizable, they do provide valuable insight into the way negativity is constructed in political discourse. This dissertation finds that discourse is crucial in the construction of negativity in the Texts. This is significant as discourse has real world consequences, such as shaping voter behaviours and legitimising decisions or actions, which should be considered closely by political practitioners and researchers.

Building on this understanding, research could be expanded to explore the discourse of other political advertising, both positive and negative, in the Australian context. Different materials, such as speeches and websites, from various political parties could be conducted to explore the construction of meaning. Analysis could also be conducted of political advertisements aired outside the Campaign Period to see if negativity is constructed differently according to the intended time of broadcast. Further, it would be useful to consider the relationship between the message and the medium in greater detail, particularly with reference to online sources, and to explore trends in political discourse over time.

Negative advertising is likely to remain a feature of Australia's political culture, as long as political parties assess the short-term benefits to outweigh the risks. This strategy is supported by Australia's compulsory voting system, where voter turnout is not a consideration. However, the continued use of negative advertising by both major parties as part of a 'ruthless' (McTernan, in Haynes, 2013) political culture may act to cancel out the informational benefits and have potentially damaging effects for voter engagement and civic

participation. Declining levels of political trust may result in difficulty engaging citizens for non-voting related civic duties (Jones and Pusey, 2008: 587), which has serious implications for civic culture and society. While political parties seem to recognise the potentially deleterious effects, more consideration should be given to the broader implications for democracy and civic culture that may result from continued negativity in political discourse in Australia.

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APPENDIX A

Australian Liberal Party television advertisements - 2013 Federal Election

SAMPLE 1 *Captain Chaos is back*
25 August 2013

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Visual frame								
Transcript	<i>In just 31 days..</i>	<i>Kevin Rudd's hit Australians with 4 new tax grabs.</i>	<i>He's admitting a 33 billion dollar budget blowout..</i>	<i>While Labor splurges another 9.2 billion and racks up interest bill on debt of \$696 million.</i>	<i>With over 4,000 boat people flooding in, his PNG and Nauru deals are a ruddy mess.</i>	<i>All this chaos in just 31 days.</i>	<i>Imagine 3 more years of Labour failure.</i>	<i>Authorized by B. Loughmane, Liberal Party, Canberra.</i>
Discourse practice	Political (election) genre.	Political (personalization); economic; and management genres.	Economic; political (personalization) management genres.	Political (party); economic; management genres.	Political (policy and personalization) genres. Intertextual reference.	Political and management genres. Intertextual reference.	Political (election and management) genres.	Political (institutional and election) genre.
Text analysis	Cognitive approach structure.	Use of 'reported voice' and categorical modality. Presentation of evidence.	Repetition of numbers.	Repetition of numbers.	Use of language to link 'boats' and 'flood' of people. 'Ruddy' takes different meaning.	Presentation of evidence. Categorical modality.	Call to reflect / action.	Formal advertising requirement.
Image analysis	Series of images of Rudd. Quick, multi-directional image transition creates sense of disorder. Written text 'in just 31 days'.	Images of Rudd. Written text '4 new taxes'.	Images of Rudd. Written text 'in just 31 days' and '4 new taxes'.	Series of unflattering images of Rudd, numbers written on screen, zooms out to show tiled series of images of Rudd.	Image of asylum seeker boat, image of Kevin Rudd losing his temper.	Written text of 'all this chaos' and image of Rudd looking feeble.	Imagine 3 more years of Labor failure text. Use of graphic, depicting the ALP logo broken.	Authorisation text written on white background
Social practice	Politics / management.	Politics / economics.	Politics / economics.	Politics / economics.	Politics / security.	Politics / media / management.	Politics / personal / management.	Politics / regulatory.

SAMPLE 2 *Trail of disaster*
13 July 2013

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Visual frame								
Transcript	<i>Last time Kevin Rudd was Prime Minister, he left behind a trail of disaster. Kevin Rudd was borrowing 100 million dollars every day.</i>	<i>And now we have a 254 billion dollar debt. He wasted up to 8 billion dollars on school hall rip-offs. He was the architect of the roof batts disaster.</i>	<i>In 2008, he dismantled our border protection policies and now 45,000 boat people have flooded in.</i>	<i>He attacked our mining industry with a super profits tax that failed. He did a back-slip on the Carbon Emissions Trading Scheme and supported the world's biggest carbon tax.</i>	<i>With 5 budget deficits and the carbon tax, Kevin Rudd and Labor have driven up the cost of living.</i>	<i>And now he's divided the Labor Party again with one third of Cabinet Ministers refusing to work with him.</i>	<i>Kevin Rudd is all talk. Imagine 3 more years of Labour failure.</i>	<i>Authorized by B. Loughmane, Liberal Party, Canberra.</i>
Discourse practice	Economic; political (policy and personalization); and management genres.	Economic; and political (policy and personalization) genres.	Political (policy and personalization) genre.	Political (policy and personalization); economic / budget genres.	Economic; management; political (policy, party and personalization) genres.	Economic; management; political (policy, party and personalization) genres.	Political (election, policy and personalization) genres.	Political (institutional and election) genre.
Text analysis	Personalized modality assigns blame to Rudd	Categorical modality assigns blame to Rudd.	Presentation of evidence.	Categorical modality assigns blame to Rudd	Presentation of evidence, personalised modality assigns blame to Rudd.	Personalised modality assigns blame to Rudd, highlights ALP disunity.	Appealing to voters to imagine.	Formal advertising requirement.
Image analysis	Formal image of Kevin Rudd. Use of scrolling text on screen replicates spoken text but with "fact" preface.	Formal image of Kevin Rudd. Use of scrolling text on screen as in first frame.	Formal image of Kevin Rudd. Use of scrolling text on screen as in first frame.	Formal image of Kevin Rudd. Use of scrolling text on screen as in first frame.	Formal image of Kevin Rudd. Use of scrolling text on screen as in first frame.	Formal image of Kevin Rudd. Use of scrolling text on screen as in first frame.	Text written "Kevin Rudd is all talk. Imagine 3 more years of Labor failure." Graphic depicts the ALP logo broken.	Authorisation text written on white background.
Social practice	Politics / personality / "fact fiction".	Politics / management.	Politics / management.	Politics / management.	Politics.	Politics / personality.	Management / politics.	Politics / regulatory.

SAMPLE 3 <i>Labour Greens Spring Clean</i> August 2013				
	1	2	3	4
Visual frame				
Transcript	<i>This Saturday, take a good look under the name of each candidate.</i>	<i>Because if they're part of the Labor Greens deal, that's a big problem.</i>	<i>This Election, have a Labor Greens spring clean.</i>	<i>Authorized by B. Loughmane, Liberal Party, Canberra.</i>
Discourse practice	Political (election and party) genre.	Political (election and party) genre.	Political (election and party) / management genres.	Political (institutional and election) genre.
Text analysis	Call to action, time reference creates sense of urgency.	Categorical modality attempts to create 'truth'. Direct reference to "they".	Call to action.	Formal advertising requirement.
Image analysis	Formal image of ballot paper.	Negatively stylized ALP logo and Greens with rubbish bag.	Negatively stylized ALP logo and Greens with rubbish bag. Written text replicates audio.	Authorisation text written on white background
Social practice	Politics / election.	Politics / election.	Politics / domestic.	Politics / regulatory.

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