Unique Approach of Affecting Public Opinion in Cyber Age Through Political Semantics

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Abstract

This research investigates how political semantics is used by world leaders and public speakers as a tool for persuading the public to accept their opinions and viewpoints concerning lots of public issues. Since semantics deals with understanding the meanings of words, phrases, and sentences together with what they infer, leaders and public speakers tend to use it to suit occasion and context. Feldman et al. (2000) emphasized the study of the role of semantics used by politicians. The study did analyses of discourse and interpretations of politicians' use of certain strategies such as "double speaking", "euphemism", and "self-reflexsiveness". Their purpose is to affect the public opinion. Hence there came the expression "semantic struggle" by Busse (1993). The researcher used and analyzed data collected from books, speeches, and the internet. The study concluded that the World Wide Web has become an available means for the public to analyze, dissect and semantically share in language used by world leaders. They now can convince back. They can help their leaders fulfill their promises for the purpose of better change. A change that can be fulfilled through contact across individuals and peoples in our cyber age.

Keywords: Public Opinion, Political semantics, Cyber age, Double speaking

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الطريقة المتميزة للتأثير على الرأي العام في العصر الالكتروني من خلال علم الدلالة السياسي

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الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث كيف يتم توظيف علم الدلالة بذكاء من جانب السياسيين وقادة العالم كوسيلة إقناع لتأييد آرائهم ووجهات نظرهم حول قضايا الرأي العام. وحيث أن علم الدلالة يهتم بدراسة معاني الكلمات والعبارات والجمل وما توحي به من دلالات واستنتاجات تختلف باختلاف المقال والمقام, فقد لجأ إليه الخطباء والقادة واستخدموه كمطية لإقناع جمهورهم. وقد أكد فيلدمان وآخرون (2000) على دراسة طبيعة وخصائص اللغة التي يستخدمها القـــادة حيـــث أن التحليل الدلالي للخطاب يساعد على فهم الإستراتيجيات المتعددة المؤثرة في السامع أو المشاهد مثل "الحديث المزدوج", و "التعابير الملطفة للمعاني الفظة", و "الإنعكاس الذاتي" وغيرها, ومن هنا جاء مصطلح "الكفاح الدلالي " للباحث بوس (1993). وقد اعتمد الباحث هنا على جمع البيانات من العديد من النصوص منها الكتب وأحاديث القادة والشـــبكة العنكبوتية حيث قام بتحليلها دلاليا. وانتهت الدراسة إلى أن شبكة المعلومات الدولية أضحت وسيلة متاحـــة للجمهـــور لكي يحلل ويفند ما يقوم به المتحدثون والقادة من استخدام دلالي للغة وتفنيدها والرد عليهـــا وبالتـــالي إقنـــاع القـــادة والمسؤولين بمحاولة تحقيق وعودهم وذلك من أجل التغيير الأفضل والذي يتحقق عن طريق التواصل بين الأفراد والأمم في عصر تلاقى فيه الجميع إلكترونيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرأي العام، علم الدلالة السياسي، العصر الإلكتروني، الحديث المزدوج

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1. Introduction

Politicians and world leaders alike tend to use semantics as a political tool to persuade their constituents to support their point of view on subjects of government and world affairs. Before what so called cyber age and internet, the public's base of discourse was their immediate families, friends and other associates who might or might not be interested to engage with them in political discourse. The internet has changed this vision. Today, because of the numerous internet sites devoted to political chat, there are millions of individuals who visit those sites for the specific purpose of engaging in the examination and analysis of their leaders' semantics, and ask the question: What does it mean? People, more than ever before in history, talk about and share ideas on their political representation on a worldwide scale. Discussions, debates and even heated arguments about political leadership are going on between people who have never met one another face-to-face. These discussions, debates, and arguments reflect the perspective of people analyzing every word being spoken by presidents, representatives of the United Nations, and even news journalists who are today, again, more than ever before seemingly affiliated more with political ideologies than they are with reporting just the news. This means that the public is examining, analyzing, and sharing ideas and thoughts about the semantics of the political lexicon.

Semantics is the study of the nature of words as they are used by people; the meaning, the inferences through classifying and understanding the changing meanings of words as they are used by people during conversations and discourse. Politicians and world leaders have long utilized semantics and, indeed, created an art in the use of political semantics. Political scientists Offer Feldman and Christ'l de Landtsheer (2000) asserted that understanding political semantics means looking to the characteristics and nature of the language used by world leaders. The semantic theory can be used to help explain why politicians choose certain words over others. It helps analyze the strategies and techniques which they employ to influence the public opinion, and the theoretical perspective they utilize when they rely on semantics to convince the people. Moreover, the semantic theory can also help distinguish fact from fiction and truth from prevarications. These are particularly timely and relevant issues in the post-September 11, 2001 environment in which politicians of every ilk seek to exploit troubling circumstances to their own advantage (Craig, 1996). This is not to say, though, that the use of euphemistic[1] speech and cloudy rhetoric by politicians is a phenomenon of the 21st century since these devices have been used throughout history to sway and influence public opinion. Unlike decades ago, however, modern politicians are able to use an enormous array of media sources to their advantage in ways that have

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1 Euphemism: An indirect word or phrase that people often use to refer to something embarrassing or unpleasant, sometimes to make it seem more acceptable than it really is (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 7th ed., 2005).

focused the increasing attention on the persuasive tactics being deployed against the general public.

1.1. Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine and understand how political semantics is being interpreted by the public, and how the sharing of information via the internet is shaping the public's opinions about their leaders and world events. This paper seeks to answer the questions: How is semantics utilized by world leaders to influence and gain the support of the public opinion? How are those efforts facilitated or hindered by the public's access to information and discourse via the internet? The research investigates, by definition, the semantic strategies and techniques which help politicians influence their audience. Therefore, the research is concerned with only those politicians who rely on semantics to shape the public opinion. To gain some fresh insights into recent trends, this paper provides a review of the relevant and scholarly literature concerning the use of political semantics as an impressive way to shape the public opinion. A summary of the research and important findings are presented in the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Semantic Theory

To influence the people is to persuade them with a certain idea. Politicians are aware of the competing interpretations of reality against their desired one, and therefore, they seek to defend the interpretations they want against other possible ones. This creates the "semantics struggles" (Busse, 1993) and

... This includes the interest to maintain the belief that there is only one reality and this reality is the same as the official reality defined in the (official) political discourse. This also implies that the belief has to be maintained that only the words (i.e. the meaning) used by the bearers of political power denote the "one and only" reality (p. 122).

Thus, the competing interpretations of the political events have to be denounced as wrong. For this specific purpose, politicians have developed strategies and techniques to help them promote their "one and only" reality to be shared by their audience and, hence, swaying the public opinion to their sides.

A strategy is a guess, a speculation and an attempt to deal with the unknown and the unknowable (Kearns, 2003). Politicians need semantic strategies to help them influence their audience because they involve planning in the light of the opportunities and limitations presented by opposing forces in the environment. A good example of how the public opinion can be shaped by crafty politicians is their careful choice of phraseology and specific words when referring to issues that are natural sore points with the general public. Just as no savvy politician wants to appear "soft" on crime and child exploitation, for example, few politicians are willing to risk their political careers as well as their chances for re-election by damaging their current popularity through the use of certain words and phrases that would be automatically perceived negatively by the electorate. For instance, according to Hipkiss

(1995), politicians prefer to couch their terminology in nebulous terms that avoid alarming voters by using "euphemism and doubletalk[1] such as the use of term revenue enhancement for taxes" (p. 102). Euphemisms and doubletalk can help sell to the public even the most ill-conceived notions provided that they are told in a convincing manner with the sincerity that many seasoned veteran politicians are able to show on demand.

Resorting to references to mainstream religion, patriotism and loyalty is simply a tool of the trade for many politicians. Such rhetoric typically ends with the phrase, "and God bless the United States of America," words that are certain to evoke a positive response from virtually any public crowd or media audience. For instance, Cloud (2004) advised that:

When government displays the symbols of the majority religion, the members of religious minorities suffer a painful status harm. In local communities at least, this is the road to a system of de facto religious parties, best understood by politicians who seize on the high emotional content of these issues (p. 311).

Today, in the post-September 11, 2001 climate, the focus of many politicians is on the "war on terrorism." As Fleming (2002) pointed out, "The label 'terrorist' evokes negative feelings, and the propagandist hopes the audience will respond the same way to the group.

But the label is not the group" (p. 3). In his inauguration speech, President Barak Obama employed the elocutionary force by touching on the issue of poverty saying:

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to the suffering outside our borders, nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it (Obama's inaugural speech, 2009, transcript on CNN. com).

Mr. Obama targets his audience's emotions by addressing values most people have in common to gain trust and enlarge his popularity by showing his care for the poor even outside the United States to denote inward and outward solidarity. Phrases such as "war on poverty" or "war on drugs" are laced with emotional and positive aspects that can be used to sway public opinion in favor of such an initiative, the actual waging of war requires a full-blown propaganda campaign in order to solidify and mobilize the support of a nation's citizenry behind the effort. As Brooks (2006) emphasized:

To say that leaders reflect the will of their people masks the fact that the people, by and large, know only what they are told by their governments. Thus, the leaders generate the mood of the people by using abstractions and symbols cloaked in catchy slogans that only purport to reflect realities (p. 86).

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[1] A language that is intended to make people believe something which is not true, or that can be understood in two different ways (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 7th ed., 2005).

Although many observers might question the threat represented by catchy slogans and abstractions, these devices have been a popular approach to shaping public opinion over the years in ways that have allowed politicians to achieve their political goals at the expense of the American taxpayer in blood and treasure.

It may be somewhat disingenuous, though, to suggest that the majority of the American public has never heard of conflict resolution techniques, but it is reasonable to suggest that most Americans believe that the country's political leadership is privy to information that may not be readily accessible to the general public and it is not surprising that the average people tend to rely on their elected officials to deliver the truth about the problems facing the country today. For this purpose, many politicians rely on scripted text that has been carefully vetted in order to ensure that it communicates just as much information as desired while avoiding any unpleasant consequences that might result from more extemporaneous speech. For instance, Malrieu (1999) believes that:

For most politicians, the obligation to be strategically efficient imposes a strict loyalty to a pre-fabricated discourse. The advantage of pre-fabricated discourse over spontaneous discourse is that it has been extensively 'tested' on a large scale, on a wide range of issues, and that it has survived the confrontation with antagonistic discourses (pp. 41-42).

A careful selection of targets is also a useful tactic for politicians who want to rail against something for their own benefit while avoiding any potential backlash from special interest groups that might result. As McCombs and Protess (1999) emphasized, the environment is almost always a safe target for political leaders who are interested in banging the drum to shift public opinion:

Pollution is also likely to be kept in the public eye because it is an issue that threatens almost everyone, not just a small percentage of the population. Since it is not politically divisive, politicians can safely pursue it without fearing adverse repercussions. Attacking environmental pollution is therefore much safer than attacking racism or poverty (p. 32).

It is far easier and safer from a politically perspective, though, to couch rhetoric in terms that require interpretation so that there is some "wiggle room"[1] in case events turn out differently than what is being articulated. In this regard, De Toledano (2001) noted that because politicians are forced to operate in the public sphere where their every action and statement are carefully scrutinized by the media if not the public, they are inclined to avoid straight talk in favor of speeches that sound good but do not necessarily communicate anything of substance beyond what the politicians desire. In this regard, De Toledano (2001) noted that "bit by bit the double- and triple-talk [used by politicians] is hailed as lucidity" (p. 48). Similar to the "big lie" that, if told forcefully enough and frequently enough will assume the

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1 Flexibility, as of options or interpretation. (Wiggle room. (2010). In The Free Dictionary, retrieved April 20, 2010 from www.thefreedictionary.com)

qualities of the truth, politicians can couch their speech in catch-phrases and buzzwords that make them sound like they know more and care more than the reality of the situation justifies.

While the world did in fact border on the brink of destruction during the mid-20th century, the threat from communism and fascism has largely dissipated in favor of a less well-defined threat to the nation's security in the form of fundamentalist terrorist groups. Unlike the "good old days" of the Cold War when the nation's adversaries were well known and had defined geographic borders, the situation is starkly different today and politicians are taking advantage of these potentially threatening conditions.

In his book, The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things, Glassner (1999) wrote that:

Start with silly scares, the kind that would be laughable were they not advanced with utter seriousness by influential politicians. Promoted by the same means as other fears, and often to the same ends, they afford a comfortable entry point into the fear mongers' bag of tricks. It becomes easier to recognize how we are bamboozled about serious concerns, having seen the same techniques at work in the promotion of frivolous dangers (p. 3).

In this burgeoning "culture of fear," the masses (e.g., the American electorate) are easier to manipulate and many politicians are ready to deliver the fear. For instance, Johnston (1998) emphasized that:

Politicians urge the prevention of human cloning, not for moral reasons, but to get on the fear-of-cloning bandwagon. We have nothing to gain but fear itself, and a good fear always gets votes (p. 69).

2.3. Techniques

A technique is mechanical and applicable to known repeated phenomenon (Lomas, 1994). Hence, it depends on more on skills than on planning. Skilled politicians have a number of semantic techniques at their disposal to influence and sway the public, one of which is known as "Card Stacking". According to Fleming (2002), this technique took place when:

...the propagandist selects and omits facts, distorts information, under- and over-emphasizes, confuses, and uses every deceptive device available to 'stack the cards' against the truth. An example would be to withhold negative information about an incident while making only positive aspects public (p. 4).

Yet another semantic device is termed the "band wagon." As the term implies, politicians who use the "Band Wagon" tactic encourage the public to "go along to get along" because it is the path of least resistance. In this regard, Fleming (2002) noted that:

This is a 'follow the crowd' device that promotes the idea that everyone else is doing what the propagandist wants the audience to do. It is more comfortable to be a member of the crowd than it is to stand out or to be left out. An example would be an appeal to vote for a particular candidate because everyone else like you is voting for that candidate (p. 4).

Likewise, politicians who use the so-called "self-reflexiveness" approach seek to persuade their audience that a partial picture or half-truths are in reality the whole truth. For instance, Fleming (2002) noted that this semantic device employs broad generalizations that can help obscure undesirable issues that might adversely affect the message being communicated. "What the 'crowd' and audience members have in common," Fleming wrote (2002), "is someone's biased, incomplete abstraction of all similarities and differences. The propagandist hopes the audience will respond to the 'similarity' abstraction as if it were a complete, objective picture of the case in support of the politician" (p. 4).

Although many politicians might be offended to be characterized as a "skilled propagandist," the fact remains that public opinion is shaped by these and other types of semantic devices. Fleming (2002) believed the term "propaganda" is used to describe "a use of language designed to evoke a particular kind of response. Propagandists exploit such techniques to influence thinking in whatever direction they want" (p. 4). By definition, then, politicians who engage in semantic devices that are intended to shape public opinion are propagandists who employ a wide range of approaches depending on the situation and need. For example, politicians may use the so-called "symbol-signal reaction" to evoke a desired response from the public. In this approach, Fleming (2002) advised that "The propagandist wants the audience to react automatically to the 'community' idea, the need to be part of the group, without thinking about whether this is best for them, whether it is still that way, and what has not been said" (p. 4). Finally, politicians can simply use the name-calling tactic as a device to shape public opinion. For instance, Fleming notes that "Here the propagandist gives a negative label to whatever the propagandist wants others to view negatively. The propagandist wants reactions to the negative label, not to evidence. An example would be to inappropriately label a group as 'terrorists'" (p. 4). No matter how inappropriate such a label might be, though, if politicians say a group of people are terrorists, the public opinion tends to follow right along.

A recent example of this tactic was the manner in which the Bush administration drummed up support for a preemptive invasion of Iraq through repeated references to Saddam Hussein as a purveyor of weapons of mass destruction and an international sponsor of terrorism, charges that were subsequently debunked but only after the president and his like-minded cronies achieved what they wanted for their Halliburton friends through a mass invasion of Iraq with no clear exit strategy in mind. From the outset, the mainstream media covered these statements from government officials on a regular basis and did little to counter these assertions, notwithstanding the mounting evidence to the contrary that continued to emerge following America's preemptive military action. After all, such fearful threats make good press and help sell newspapers and garner additional viewers for

other media. Based on a content analysis of media reports preparatory to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Gasher (2003, cited in Harmon and Muechen's essay, "Semantic Framing in the Build-Up to the Iraq War: Fox V. CNN and Other U. S. Broadcast News Programs," 2009) emphasized that, "language is a powerful weapon of war" and "a textual analysis of Time and Newsweek, covering the two weeks preceding and following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq determined the news coverage delivered a message remarkably similar to that of the Bush Administration" (p. 12). As portrayed by the Bush administration and the mainstream American media, a preemptive invasion of Iraq was just good sense:

The war was a relatively benign solution to a serious and immediate threat, a message designed to play to well to a nation still traumatized by the terror attacks of September 11th and still familiar with the Gulf War demonization of Saddam Hussein (Harmon & Muechen, 2009, p. 12).

From a strictly pragmatic perspective, then, scary news sells and the media and politicians routinely use this tactic to help shape public opinion to match their own agenda-setting needs.

3. Methodology

This chapter describes the methods used to collect the data relevant to the questions of the research stated in chapter one. Due to the difficulty and inconvenience of conducting interviews with the relevant participants such as leaders of countries or influential politicians, the research relies mainly on other resources such as books and reliable internet websites. For the specific purpose of the study, those resources are regarded as instruments.

3.1. Research Method and Data Collection

This research is conducted according to the descriptive method. It uses a review of the relevant scholarly literature to develop fresh insights into recent trends concerning the use of political semantics as a tool for shaping public opinion. This research makes use of the literature review to help describe the topic and refine the research questions and directions. It presents a clear description and evaluation of the theories and concepts and clarifies their relationship to previous research. The following are the main sources of the data that serve the purpose of the research:

3.1.1. Politicians' Speeches

To illustrate how political semantics is utilized to influence the public opinion, the researcher quotes excerpts from speeches delivered by politicians, one of which is a statement said by the former president of the United States, Bill Clinton, when testifying before the Grand Jury after the impeachment of an inappropriate relationship. Clinton's statement is collected from a video found online on You Tube.com. The other excerpt is delivered by the current president of the United States, Barack Obama, and taken from his inaugural speech on Jan, 21st , 2009. Obama's speech is found in script on CNN. com.

3.1.2. Books

Books written by scholars to share ideas and information on political

semantics and analyze world events are used to help answer the questions of the research. These books are listed in the references.

3.1.3. Internet

Reliable websites are used to show how the public reacts toward political semantics. As the internet facilitates the public's analysis and examination of political semantics, some websites are mentioned to support the argument raised by the researcher. Language Log, found on http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languag elog/archives/004862.html is a site where political semantics are explained and analyzed by people. Moreover, Google search engine is used to obtain a rough number of the websites allocated for the terms and expressions pertaining to the political semantics used on the certain events in question.

3.2. Summary

The qualitative data examined as illustrating examples have been collected from the internet, books and world leaders' speeches to demonstrate the powers of critical analysis by, for instance, exposing the taken for granted assumptions, underpinning previous research and clarifying how political semantics is employed to fulfill the agenda behind them. This research heavily relies on the literature review because the art of employing semantics in politics depends on the wisdom and perspective of each politician. Strategies, techniques and examples are extracted mainly from politicians of the United States due to the tremendous role the United States plays in influencing the public opinion.

4. Findings and Discussion
4.1. Examples on Semantics Employed by Politicians

The influence of visual options available through the internet has become a powerful source for the people to get closer with the rationality than what they had been sticking to in terms of face value in the early years. As far as a political speech is concerned, it is meant to provoke the public when politicians use their semantic techniques to catch the attention of the public by making their statements and manifestations more attractive and reasonable. However, the irony in the early years was that the media lacked extra support and visual aids like the internet for the public when the leaders proved to be different. Today, the masses have more chances to develop their rights to analyze and interpret the communication of political leaders with the support of media in terms of visual aids such as the internet. This is exemplified by America's former president, William Jefferson Clinton, when, in 1998, testifying before a Grand Jury investigating inappropriate behavior with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky; Clinton testified that he did not lie when he said he did not have an inappropriate relationship with the intern because:

It depends on what the meaning of the word is is... if 'is' means is and never has been, that is not, that is one thing. If it means there is none, that was a completely true statement (What is is. (2010). On YouTube, retrieved October 20, 2009 from www. you tube. com.)

Clinton went on to explain his rationale to the jury, saying that if someone had questioned him as to the appropriateness or inappropriateness of his relationship with the intern: ". . .that is, asked me a question in the present tense, I would have said no. And it would have been completely true (What is is. (2010). On YouTube, retrieved October 20, 2009 from www. you tube. com.)."

Clinton's remarks to the jury were published in a transcript that was circulated on the internet, and then the video tape of Clinton testifying and making the comments was also circulated on the internet, and, today, is found on You tube.com. It circulates the internet today not so much because people are unaware that Mr. Clinton took an oath on the Christian Bible to tell the truth, and then lied, but because it indicates that the American people cannot take the words of their elected officials at face value. Rather, they must analyze and look at the meaning of even small words like "is" that might completely alter the meaning of the truth. In the case of Clinton, it was employment of semantics to mitigate the public reaction to his inappropriate relationship with Lewinsky, even to deceive the public as to the truth.

A second example of political semantics comes, once again, through the presidency and diplomacy of the Clinton Administration. In 1994, when the Rwandan Hutu embarked upon a systematic annihilation of the Tutsi in Rwanda, the United States, under the Clinton administration, decided not to intervene in the violence that was described by people in and outside of Rwanda as Zeleza and McConnaughy (2004) stated:

Members of the Clinton administration from former Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Madeleine Albright, then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, could not bring themselves to call the killings (of the Tutsi by the Hutus) genocide. Under international law, the United States was obligated to prevent genocide, and thus, should have intervened in Rwanda (p. 79).

Instead, the Clinton administration worked around the definition of genocide, which was evidenced by the mass killings, and referred to the violence as "a longstanding tribal conflict (p. 179)." The word "genocide" was succinctly avoided in an employment of political semantics, because the word "genocide" would have triggered a public reaction that, in 1994, could have adversely impacted Clinton's upcoming re-election efforts. However, according to classified documents[1] recently made available for the first time, senior officials privately used the word "genocide" within 16 days of the start of the killings, but chose not to do so publicly because the president had already decided not to intervene. Besides, the administration did not want to repeat the fiasco of US intervention in Somalia, where US troops became sucked into fighting. It also felt that the US had no interests in Rwanda: a small central African country with no minerals or strategic value (The Guardian, 2004).

1.These are intelligence reports obtained using the US Freedom of Information Act (The Guardian, 2004)

In 1994, when the events unfolded in Rwanda, the use of the internet was not at the heightened, almost frenzied, level of information utilization as it is today. The Rwandan genocide of the Tutsis, however, will, today, yields 2,640,000 sites for information on the subject. The pressure brought to bear as a result of public opinion and continuing discourse on the subject no doubt played a part in Clinton's subsequent apology (albeit years later) to the Rwandan people, as well as his frequent public responses to questions about those events that have caused Clinton to repeatedly and publicly state that he "regrets" Rwanda.

Another example of employing semantics to help politicians shape the public opinion comes from the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The media at first depicted the war as "War for Iraq". Using "for" implies the devotion and selflessness of the United States in its endeavor which was manifested in Bush's call for "democracy" and "freedom" for Iraqis. Such usage helped, at first, persuade the public that the invasion of Iraq was indeed Bush's responsibility. Nonetheless, when the public opinion turned against the invasion, a new usage prevailed. Unlike "War for Iraq" which implies the presence of another party in the big picture, "War in Iraq" is a neutral phrase that for someone who, hypothetically speaking, has never heard of America invading Iraq, would seem as denoting civil war or even sectarian violence. It now yields more than 46,000,000 results on the Google search engine. Such shifts in the use of semantics mirror the public's opinion.

4.2. How the Public Interprets Political Semantics and Uses the Internet to Impact Policy and Government

One of the most significant examples of how the internet has facilitated the public's access to information, and how people worldwide have analyzed political semantics and used the information to shape policy and government is the second term of America's former President George W. Bush. The words "weapons of mass destruction" were used by the Bush administration to justify the use of America's own arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and its invasion of Iraq (Woodward, 2006).

Later, in the aftermath of the destruction of Iraq, the American public engaged in extensive "chat" about "weapons of mass destruction." Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction were ". . . what this war was about" (Woodward, 2006, p. 95). When no such weapons were uncovered in Iraq, the question, "Where are the weapons of mass destruction?" was bandied about internet chat rooms by Americans, the British, and people around the world. When a Polish reporter who was granted an interview with President Bush "prodded him: But still, those countries that did not support the Iraqi Freedom Operation still use the same argument – weapons of mass destruction have not been found" (Woodward, 2006, pp. 95-96), Bush replied: "We found weapons of mass destruction" . . . asserting that two mobile laboratories "to build

biological weapons had been located" (Woodward, 2006, p. 96).

In the instance of weapons of mass destruction, the term devolved politically from one inferred by the American and world public as meaning nuclear capability and threat to biological warfare laboratories, but no biological weapons. The employment of political semantics is used to motivate, sway, and build public trust and opinion, but in the age of the internet, the terms are dissected, analyzed, and rationalized by the public. In the case of weapons of mass destruction that were never found in Iraq, world opinion became an anti-American world reaction.

"Where are those weapons of mass destruction?" became the question asked around the globe, and was perhaps the single most factor in bringing down the American Republican party in the 2008 presidential election.

Internet sites devoted to decoding political semantics have become popular on the internet. Language Log, found on http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languag elog/archives/004862.html is a site where political semantics are explained and analyzed by people. It "quizzes" the public on their knowledge of political semantics. National Public Radio (NPR) provides podcasts[1] and commentaries and invites public opinion in analyzing and discussing political semantics (NPR, 2009, found online on

http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104782089.
Portable Document Format (PDF) documents written by scholars and non-scholars alike are published on the internet that share ideas and information on political semantics, analyzing world events and leaders. The war in Iraq has more than 3,800,000 sites dedicated to British chat on the war in Iraq (War in Iraq. (2010). On Google, retrieved March 25, 2010 from www. Google. com). The words "world economic crisis" yields more than a million sites for people to engage in discussion and to exchange ideas and information on the current financial crisis. As people share and receive information around the globe, they form conclusions that influence their decisions in electing political leaders. They voice their support for, or resentment of, the need to take action. Today, their political leaders find that politics is no longer a matter of giving speeches and tossing around political semantics to gain public support. The public is examining every word, every phrase, and, in the case of former President Bush and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, turning those semantics around in the form of questions that if they cannot be answered, the politicians will experience political demise.

5. Conclusion

The internet has become a source of analyzing and dissecting political semantics, and people are impacting public policy and causing political leaders to bend to the will of not just their constituents in their nation-states, but world public opinion. We can see that with the current

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[1] A series of digital mediafiles (either audio or video) that are released episodically and often downloaded through web syndication. (Podcast. (2010). In The Free Dictionary, retrieved April 20, 2010 from www.thefreedictionary.com)

American President Barak Obama's administration. Obama's political promise of a "transparent" government has been widely discussed and debated as to the meaning, characteristic, and nature of the word "transparent." A Google search of the words "chat forum Obama transparent government," yields around 2,000,000 sites that discuss and invite discussion on the meaning of "transparency" in the American government (Chat forum Obama transparent government. (2010). On Google, retrieved March 25, 2010 from www. Google. com). Many of the discussions are negative; people – not just Americans – do not believe that the Obama administration is fulfilling its promise of a transparent government. This has been a source of irritation for the American Democratic Party, especially in the area of the financial crisis in the West and Mr. Obama's national healthcare plan.

What is most interesting is that political leaders seem surprised, taken aback, and not sure how to respond as they called upon by their constituents and the world community to fulfill the meaning of the promises they make to their constituents and to other world leaders and people. The internet has changed the political atmosphere of the world, and, because of the internet, people no longer rely upon the impressions of the semantics of the political leaders in forming opinions about people of cultures and traditions other than their own. We see these changes impacting the West more than other nations, because the Western nations have processes whereby the public opinion is the basis upon which their leaders are elected. Public opinion has forced the West to change their strategy in Iraq. This could not have come about but for the exchange of ideas and information that has been facilitated by the internet. Today, people on a global basis have an opportunity to go to people of other nations and to ask questions and get information that their political leaders would otherwise disguise in political semantics like "weapons of mass destruction," to instill fear and bias for the purposes of accomplishing Western expansionism. This could not be accomplished without the internet, where people from around the world meet anonymously in forums of intellectual exchange and the transfer of information and ideas.

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