

“Republicans are hotter”

A Critical Discourse Analysis on Ideology and Persuasion in TikTok Videos by the
Conservative Dating Application *Date Right Stuff*

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Social media discourses have become polarized, with provocative content often drawing the attention of viewers. In this thesis I examine the reinforcement of conservative ideologies and strategies of persuasion in TikTok marketing videos posted by the conservative dating app *Date Right Stuff*. These videos have sparked controversy and garnered attention by taking strong stances on current political and social issues in the United States making them a compelling case study on ideological dissemination and persuasion in a popular social media platform.

The analysis is based on Critical Discourse Analysis, specifically Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model. I analyze the text dimension with a toolkit adapted from Fairclough while the discourse and social practice levels are examined together through persuasion analysis, incorporating modified tools inspired by van Dijk’s triangulation framework.

The findings and results of the study indicate that ideologies are reinforced in the data through divisive and polarizing language that seeks to persuade and provoke the viewer through right-wing discourses, humor and sarcasm, implication, and recontextualization. This thesis aims to show the importance of social media literacy and illustrate how power can be exercised over viewers and ideologies reinforced through casual discourse.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough, Three-dimensional Model, Dating Applications, Social Media, Marketing, Conservatives, Ideology, Persuasion, Implicature

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1 Introduction

Humans have always had a need to connect to others across cultures and stay in touch to the outside world (Lieberman in Cook 2013). People want to stay connected to friends and loved ones, in addition to making new connections and relationships along the way. This need is one of the forces that has driven forward communication technologies, that make it possible to stay connected whenever and wherever. Societies have become largely mediatized and communication has become partially instrumentalized as devices such as smartphones are used to employ different platforms and applications for the purpose of keeping in touch and staying on top of the everchanging social media realm.

One area of life that has rooted itself to online platforms is dating and relationships. Online dating is an example of the many contemporary ways to meet new people and find connections. Dating applications (henceforth apps) have become fairly accessible as alternative forms of meeting people in addition to face-to-face encounters. In fact, while online dating was still stigmatized in the early 2010s, many have come to prefer dating apps over meeting people in person (Bandinelli and Gandini 2022).

There are dating apps for variety of purposes and for specific groups, making it easier for users to decide which app to choose based on their own opinions, values and ideals (Wu and Trottier 2022). In addition, dating apps uphold a certain set of values themselves when the companies that own and operate them choose a target group for their specific app and advertise them accordingly (ibid.). Thus, finding a niche and filling a gap in the market can be a lucrative business for companies that seek new ways of making profit (Bandinelli and Gandini 2022). For example, an American conservative dating app Date Right Stuff is targeted towards the conservative population in the United States and the app promotes right-wing opinions on current topics of discussion in the country which can be seen on their website, their social media content and advertising (Sengul 2025). In this thesis I aim to analyze how conservative ideologies are presented and reinforced through the content the Date Right Stuff app publishes on their most popular social media account @DateRightStuff on TikTok. Secondly, I discuss how the content aims to persuade the viewer to join the conservative ideology, and perhaps, the app itself.

The motivation for this study consists of several intertwined reasons. Firstly, it is important to understand how different value systems from all areas of life can be virtually transferred into

the realm of social media. For instance, politics, family life, religion and dating are few of many discourses that happen on social media platforms and are discussed in this thesis. It is not irrelevant how these topics are discussed on different social media platforms. It is necessary to understand that these discourses do not happen in a vacuum and that they often involve ulterior motives. In addition, the need to stay connected and to keep up with current social media trends is an important factor as viewers are active interpretators of the discourses and messaging, especially in the case of ideologically loaded discussions.

The visibility and the possible monetization of the Date Right Stuff app's content on social media is a prominent factor that motivates this study. The videos have the potential to reach millions of people, which grants more power to people behind the posts. John McEntee, one of the apps founders, is the main figure featured in the videos which is an important factor that is discussed later in section 2. In general, brands and companies have acknowledged the power of social media engagement and are using it to their advantage (Irmas 2024). Many companies do use social media not only for advertising, but they also create content that also sells an agenda, promotes values, and endorses lifestyles simultaneously (Saviolo and Marazza 2013). Some companies do it seamlessly, making it more difficult to identify a post or a video as marketing as it blends deceptively into the social media discourse through social media users (Ekinici, Dam and Buckle 2024). This could be identified more as influencer marketing, and it is an effective way to promote ideas in a manner that feels more organic to the context and platform at hand (Ooi et al. 2023). It is essential to understand that these videos most often have an agenda, be it advertising or content monetarization. In addition, creating engaging social media content is a lucrative business for companies and, for example, the Date Right Stuff app's social media content is almost a product in itself. It could be a source of profit for the creators in addition to the actual functions of the app itself.

In addition to the visibility of the Date Right Stuff app's content, dating apps themselves are popular as ever which might make content dating apps put out more interesting for the consumers looking for connections through these apps. In light of a Pew Research Center poll (Brown 2020), it can be argued that the nature of dating and starting relationships in America has changed as nearly half of the responses indicate that dating has become more difficult in the last ten years. Online dating sites and dating apps attempt to combat this issue and people are interested in the possibilities virtual dating can offer. As reported in Forbes (Booth 2024), online dating is very popular in America where nearly three in ten adults state they have used a dating site or a dating app. Consequently, it is essential to understand how the apps present

themselves in social media to possible future users. In a Fox Business (2022) interview, one of the founders of the Date Right Stuff app, John McEntee, is asked how people who are not conservative or liberal and stand in the middle would like the Right Stuff app to which he responds with “that person would love our app, because most people just want a normal dating experience”. This illustrates how advertising and statements by companies try and can change the viewers minds or even influence their opinions which is why it is crucial to understand the role of the content companies such as the Right Stuff release.

In the light of the introduction and motivations presented, I answer the following questions in this study:

1. How are conservative ideologies reinforced in the Date Right Stuff application’s social media marketing videos?
2. How do the Date Right Stuff application’s videos persuade or manipulate the viewer?

This thesis approaches the topic of ideology through Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), specifically through Norman Fairclough’s ([1989] 2015) three-dimensional model. This approach critically describes and discusses ideologies in social media language in text, discourse and social practices. As the content reaches millions, it is necessary to remember that viewers are not merely a passive audience, but rather active participants in social discourse and interpreters of the messages in the social media content they consume, possibly to the point they are influenced by the interaction. Social media is therefore a tool for pushing forward opinions, ideologies and stereotypes that can be understood as truths or lies by recipients and cause reactions from positive to negative and hurtful (KhosraviNik 2017). It can be used for reproducing and distributing values, attitudes and ideologies (KhosraviNik 2018).

In this section I have provided an introduction to the topic of this thesis and elaborated on the motivations behind it. Section 2 is dedicated to discussing the relevant background information where I briefly introduce the key concepts in traditional marketing in relation to this thesis as well as social media marketing, with emphasis on TikTok. Dating apps are briefly discussed to give context for the genre of apps the thesis discussed. After the overall introduction to dating app, I take a closer look at the Date Right Stuff app itself as it is a crucial part for contextualizing the dataset. As all the videos in the data feature John McEntee,

I believe it is important to cover his background in this section as well. He has ties to American politics, so the relevant political aspects for this study are discussed in the same subsection. In section 3, I introduce the theoretical frameworks for this thesis. Firstly, I introduce the field of Critical Discourse Analysis as the foundation for the analysis after which I discuss Norman Fairclough's ([1989] 2015) three-dimensional mode as the main framework for this study. In this section, all the dimensions are explained and the tools for analyzing the text dimension are presented. The section finishes off with a discussion on persuasion and manipulation in the videos and presents the toolkit which is used in persuasion analysis. Section 4 presents the materials and methods, and I explain what the data is like, how it was collected and discuss the methodology of the analysis. Following this, section 5 dives into the analysis which is done by applying the presented methods to the transcribed data. In section 6, I discuss the findings and limitations and expand on relevant themes that relate to the analysis. Conclusion section 7 ties the thesis together and I conclude the key findings finishing the thesis.

2 Background

This section illustrates the relevant background information for the purposes of this thesis. In section 2.1, I begin by briefly discussing what marketing is, followed by comparing it with emerging trends. In section 2.2, I introduce TikTok, the platform where the data is from and how it linked to marketing and influencing. Then I move on to briefly explain dating apps and introduce the Date Right Stuff app in section 2.3. The last subsection is dedicated to one of the app's founders, John McEntee, who is featured in the analyzed videos and discussed throughout the analysis section. In addition, I briefly cover American politics and conservatism as McEntee is a political figure and it is important to understand the political context where the videos are filmed in.

2.1 Short overview on traditional marketing

The data I have gathered for this thesis could be categorized as marketing as the videos are published on a company social media account that promotes a product. This might not be the most typical marketing content in social media and that will be elaborated on in section 2.2. Traditional forms of marketing and advertising, such as print media (magazines, posters, flyers) and broadcast media (television, radio), have arguably become less prominent in today's fast paced society where information and advertising are hard to miss on the internet and social media.

Kotler et al. define marketing “as the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return” (2017 5). This definition focuses on the positive give and take idea of consumption which is, however, not always the case as companies can hold disproportionate power over average consumers. In addition, traditional marketing is often directed at mass audiences and does not offer an easy way for two-way communication between brand and consumer (Kotler et al. 2017, 502–503). Marketing is strategic and even though companies do most of their advertising behind the scenes, consumers play a role in the visibility of a product. Thus, customer satisfaction can help to sell a product in larger quantities as a satisfied customer will buy the product again or recommend it to other people who then essentially do the marketing for the company and its products (Kotler et al. 2017, 6). From a linguistic standpoint, marketing and advertising highlight the language and discourse skills advertisers should possess in order to be able to capture people's attention. Bhatia concludes that “advertising is

one of the most dynamic and versatile genres of public discourse today, in that it can boast [...] some of the most varied and innovative uses of lexico-grammatical and discursual forms and rhetorical strategies” (2005, 214). Traditional marketing often relies on straightforward advertising of a product. In Bhatia’s view, “straight-line advertisements, where the focus is product selling, most often use “product appraisal” as the main persuasive strategy (ibid.). However, this is not always the case and, for example, the data analyzed in this thesis utilizes different ways to increase engagement.

Variation in advertising genres and the everchanging nature of promotional content can make analyzing them challenging. According to Bhatia, “as a result of this kind of variation, one may find variety of promotional genres forming some kind of a colony, which will have members serving a range of communicative purposes, of which the most dominant one might be promotional in nature” (2005, 218–219). This thesis relies on understanding the importance of linguistic aspects of marketing as the data can be understood as promotional content while also having other possible purposes for it as well, such as personal gain. For this thesis, understanding the underlying purposes of marketing shall suffice as the focus is not on marketing analysis. Section 2.2 below further elaborates the marketing and engagement elements that differentiates the data from pure marketing strategies.

2.2 TikTok and its social media marketing bubble

The videos analyzed in this thesis have a wide audience and the platform they are posted on has a contributing factor in the circulation and popularity of content. Hill (2022) summarizes TikTok and its core features from a marketing perspective. TikTok is a video-sharing platform that allows users to create videos that can last from a few seconds up to ten minutes. The videos appear in the front page of the app where the user can scroll down to see more videos one by one. TikTok is best known for short videos filmed within the app. However, uploading existing videos to the app separately allows videos to be up to sixty minutes long. Users can engage with the videos by liking, commenting and sharing, or by duetting and stitching them, which allows users to add their own videos next to the original post as a way of interacting with them. TikTok has a tendency to capture masses of people in so called trends that become popular within the app, creating a bubble of material that non-users may find difficult to fully comprehend without having enough background information. All these features encourage engagement with the videos, which increases the visibility of the posts and the app itself.

Many social media figures and companies have harnessed these features to gain visibility and effectively increased their following and use this traffic to monetize their content, as specified by Hill (2022). The ethics of this are widely discussed in and outside of the app as transparency is not always guaranteed. When creators receive money for the videos they make, they do not always disclose their affiliations and sponsors, which can create distrust towards creators. It is important to remember, however, that a large following or millions of video views does not necessarily correlate with the companies' or brands' success in business or the quality of their products.

As already mentioned, the trend aspect of TikTok can be misleading when accounts suddenly become popular. One possibility for users is to create content that is provocative and thus gets distributed more between other users. In the context of social media discourse, the term 'rage-baiting' is nowadays often used to describe content that is deliberately provocative, polarizing and opinionated in order to 'bait' viewers to engage usually by creating an emotional response (Fox 2025). This is often done to increase engagement as content that evokes an emotional response attracts more traffic to the account (Gruet and Lawton 2024; Manguiat 2024). This is one way to market oneself. It is, however, worth reiterating that there is no direct link between the number of clicks a video receives and product success. Alas, having the attention of the audience might a contribution of other things than only good marketing of a quality product. This angle is important for this thesis as the data can be categorized as provocative and 'rage-baiting'.

In addition to provocation, TikTok as an advertising platform has almost become a bubble where videos that are popular are recreated over and over in the hopes of going 'viral'. Virality refers to the likelihood of content spreading quickly and generating a high level of user engagement (Sangiorgio et al. 2025, 2–3). For example, Date Right Stuff posts videos that do not necessarily count as traditional marketing and the focus is not on product appraisal, yet the content receives attention. Many videos in the @daterightstuff account can be classified as viral as many of them have tens of millions of views and one to four million likes. This phenomenon might be one of the reasons why monetization within the app has become a business of its own which might encourage businesses and companies to strategize their video making on TikTok (ibid.). It is unclear whether Date Right Stuff and John McEntee are able to profit off of their content directly as there is no indication whether they qualify for the TikTok Creator Rewards-program or have a business account which allow for content monetization as explained in the TikTok support page on their website (TikTok n.d.).

In addition to user generated engagement, it is worth mentioning that the inner workings of the app itself, such as the algorithm, suggested posts and the far individualized user experience play a role in what videos become popular or how much visibility they get. However, the scope of this thesis allows a limited investigation into this area. Thus, the mechanics of the app are not considered further here or in the analysis. Some implications of the platform characteristics are, however, briefly discussed in the discussion section. The focus of this thesis is therefore on the collected data itself, rather than on the app's features and mechanics.

After the data collection process and starting the writing process of the present thesis, developments regarding TikTok have taken place in the United States. TikTok has been under fire as current US President Donald Trump wishes to ban the app in the United States which is an issue former President Joe Biden left for President Trump to decide on (Walsh 2025). The executive order was set in motion, and the platform was briefly banned on 17 January 2024. However, it went back online after a day. The conditions of the platform in the US are unclear until further notice as the ban might be reinstated again or TikTok's ownership might change (ibid.). The implications of this for the present thesis are minimal as there is no change in accessing it in Finland and the app was up and running during in the United States during the data collection process. In addition, the data will still be available in the platform regardless of the ban as uploaded videos should not be deleted unless the users decide to do so. To prevent such loss of data during the analysis, the data was downloaded to a local device for transcription purposes so the analysis can be conducted. In any case, these actions taken by the US Government, the discussions about large social media corporations and the power of social media discourse all indicate how important it is to analyze social media and to understand their connection to politics. These aspects are further discussed in section 6.

2.3 Introducing Dating Apps and the Right Stuff App

Dating in the virtual world has evolved from computer-based matchmaking services in the 1960s to various mobile dating applications of today (Kuefler 2019). Online dating kickstarted in 1995 after the launch of the world's first online dating site Match.com which allowed remote dating like never before (ibid.). The number of single people seeking a relationship has exploded ever since, which presents many business opportunities to online dating apps and sites (Pettersen and Karlsen 2024). While stigmatized only a decade ago, online dating has become a preferred way of dating for many (Bandinelli and Gandini 2022).

Smartphones, social media platforms and countless dating applications have entered the market to cater to the needs of virtually everybody. There are apps for various genders, the LGBTQ+ community, people with specific illnesses or disabilities, and people with a certain political view for instance, and the purpose ranges from casual hook-ups to serious relationships (Wu and Trottier 2022). Finding a niche to focus on can therefore be an advantage when launching a dating app as it fills a gap in the market. Naturally, the companies keep evolving to answer the everchanging demand and the people looking for connections through dating apps can choose where they want to look for them based on their own values and needs.

The Date Right Stuff app, formerly known as The Right Stuff app before being rebranded in November 2024, is one example of a specialized platform that aims to serve a very specific demographic, the American conservative and Republican population. It belongs to an Alternative-Technology or Alt-Tech movement that seeks to provide a parallel social media ecosystem that caters for conservatives and the right-wing, as the app name itself suggests (Sengul 2025). It was created by John McEntee, Daniel Huff and Isaac Stalzer as a place where, according to them, conservatives can find each other easier and be themselves. The Right Stuff (2022) app's website states that "the Right Stuff was created for conservatives to connect in authentic and meaningful ways", whereas "[o]ther dating apps have gone woke", and emphasizes that "[w]e bring people together with shared values and similar passions." The term *woke*, McEntee is referring to has roots in social activism that pertains to people of color, from where it has broadened to include actions that aim to tackle racial and social injustices altogether (Sobande et al. 2022). Wokeness has been weaponized in right-wing discourses to be a negative attribute of the progressive left (ibid.). Date Right Stuff aims to be everything but woke, which can be seen in the whole discourse on their social media.

McEntee sought to create a conservative userbase that agrees with this anti-woke sentiment. He explains in a Fox Business (2022) interview that a couple thousand conservative social media figures were invited to the app during its launch in 2022 after which the app grows on an invite structure. This means that existing users invite other conservatives they believe to be suitable users.

After the app's launch their social media accounts have gathered a large following and presence which the app is arguably best known for. As of September 2024, the app's TikTok account has 3.3 million followers and its Instagram account 1.8 million followers. The app

itself is not accessible to everyone due to the invite only structure. Anyone can, however, interact with their social media content which gives some insight into what the app is like and what can be expected of it. The app's social media popularity far exceeds the popularity of the app itself as illustrated by the reports on Statista (2023): on the day of the app's launch it was downloaded 8100 times and in the month of October 2022 around 38 000 times after which the downloads decreased "after it failed to onboard women as users". In 2024, between March and June, the downloads have ranged anywhere from 958 to 4568 (ibid.). Regardless of these numbers, the app TikTok account has gained much more engagement, making its social media content perhaps more interesting area of research than the app itself. The videos and data are presented in more detail in section 4 when discussing materials and methods.

2.4 Brief look into Right Stuff's John McEntee and American politics

John McEntee is one of the Date Right Stuff app's founding members and the face of the app as he is featured in each of the app's videos on their TikTok which is why a short introduction is needed for contextualizing the videos further. Firstly, McEntee has a history within the American political sphere as he served as a personal aide to the former president Donald Trump in 2017 until he was fired for security clearance issues (Pengelly 2024). However, McEntee returned in 2020 in a different role as a director of the Presidential Personnel Office which essentially put him in charge of hiring White House staff (ibid.). He identifies as Republican and conservative which can be seen throughout his career in the White House and as a founder of the Date Right Stuff conservative app. Even after former President Trump's departure from the White House, he has kept close contact to politics. The 'about' page on Date Right Stuff app's website (The Right Stuff 2024) concludes the following: "Since leaving government, McEntee has been sought out as an advisor on government, most notably as a Senior Advisor to the Heritage Foundation's Presidential Transition Project (Project 2025), the most comprehensive conservative reform plan in U.S. history." This affiliation is an important element in the social and political context of this thesis as it ties into the definitions of American conservatism and the divide between the Republican and Democratic parties and conservative and liberal ideologies in general. Ideology as a concept is discussed further in section 3 where the theoretical framework is presented.

The relevant aspects of American politics for this thesis are the political parties and what they represent. The two dominant political parties in the United States are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The former is in the center-left and are often referred to as liberal

and progressive whereas the latter is situated more to the right and are described more conservative.

This thesis focuses on American conservatism as exemplified by Date Right Stuff app and John McEntee that seek to reinforce a conservative agenda, as previously identified by Sengul (2025). *Conservatism* can be defined in many ways and traditionally different areas of conservatism can be detected:

American Conservatism has conventionally been divided into three parts: Social Conservatism, Economic Conservatism, and Conservatism in foreign policy with its priority of protection of the national interest. (Sidorsky 2016, 55).

Social conservatism includes issues such as abortion right, LGBTQ+ rights and separation of church and state (Sidorsky 2016, 59). These topics are often sensitive and opposed by conservatives as too progressive or ‘woke’ which is also the stance McEntee takes. *Economic conservatism* concerns itself with economic recovery and criticism towards the government which is a deep-rooted conservative sentiment: “the connection between the argument for smaller government and lowering the rate of unemployment is carried out through the thesis that economic growth is generated primarily by the private sector” (Sidorsky 2016, 62). This idea is then realized in the demand for lowering taxation (ibid.). Lastly, *conservatism in foreign policy* has changed throughout history. However, the common factor is its “priority of protection of the national interests” (Sidorsky 2016, 63–64). Naturally, there is variation in conservatism and not everyone supports this quite rigid classification of conservative attitudes and ideologies. McEntee does, however, follow this more traditional right-wing conservative ideal (Sengul 2025), which is why this definition shall suffice for the purposes of this thesis.

With the two-party system comes different ways of interpreting the differences between the two. Polarization is a term often used to describe the American political field and the divisions in it. According to Zimmer, “scholars have usually focused on political or partisan polarization, defining it, in simple terms, as a widening gap between the two major parties, resulting from Democrats becoming more liberal and Republicans becoming more conservative” (2019, 403). He criticizes polarization narratives as “catch-all explanations” for the social and political paradigms of today (Zimmer 2023). However, as emphasized by him, “no one disputes that party polarization – defined as the distance between the two major parties widening – is particularly pronounced today” (ibid.), which is an important distinction to make as it still acknowledges polarization as a phenomenon. For the purposes of this thesis

the more simple and descriptive understanding of polarization suffices as McEntee operates on the level of party separation and the conservative versus liberal sentiment. Even though the scope of the thesis limits the discussion of this angle, it is important to acknowledge the various nuances and aspects that polarization cannot account for by itself and how there is more to American politics than what a simple definition of polarization leads us to believe.

3 Theoretical framework

The framework of this study is a set of tools in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis. First, in section 3.1, I illustrate what it is according to some notable definitions by scholars within the field. Following this, I discuss how it serves this study in addition to some criticism towards it. In section 3.1.1, describe Norman Fairclough's ([1989] 2015) three-dimensional model which is the main framework in this study. This section incorporates the textual analysis tools as they are modified from tools provided by Fairclough. Lastly section 3.1.1 presents the tools for analyzing the discursive and social practice levels through the lens of persuasion.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis, henceforth CDA, can be defined in several ways, which makes it a complex, yet useful approach in linguistic analysis. It is worth mentioning that CDA can also be referred to as Critical Discourse Studies or CDS, which is the more recent term.

According to Flowerdew and Richardson “while CDS is rapidly becoming the favorite acronym, Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) was previously referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)” (2018, 1). In this thesis, I prefer and use CDA as a term as the theoretical literature I use frequently refers to CDA and as it is an equally sufficient term to use as CDS.

According to van Dijk, CDA is discourse analytical research that “primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (2015, 466). The power aspect of language is a central to many definitions of CDA. For instance, according to Wodak, “a defining feature of CDA is its concern with power as a central condition in social life, and its efforts to develop a theory of language which incorporates this as a major premise” (2001, 11). Fairclough shares this notion of power in his “radical view of CDA” which “emphasizes the power *behind* discourse rather than just the power in discourse” ([1989] 2015, 3). In addition, Fairclough introduces CDA as a tool for raising awareness towards how language plays a part in the domination of others (ibid.), which is something this thesis aims to do as well.

For Wodak, the critical aspect of CDA means “to be understood as having distance to the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and focus on self-reflection in the scholars doing research” (2001, 9). In addition, Fairclough explains that “being critical is not just identifying features and types of discourse which are open to

criticisms of various sorts [...], it is also asking: *why* is the discourse like this?” ([1989] 2015, 7). In other words, “being critical means looking for explanations” (ibid.). The criticality aspect suits this thesis as the aim is to critically assess the socio-political discourse in social media to reveal ideologies that may be present and to discuss the reason why this might be the case. To be clear, the purpose of this thesis is not to tell what is wrong and what is right. Instead, the goal is make people more ware of this type of discourse, to help them recognize it and to illustrate why social media research is warranted from a linguistic viewpoint, as discussed by Esposito and KhosraviNik (2024).

Regardless of the common themes and features within CDA practice, it is widely accepted that there is no one way to define CDA or its methods, which also leaves room for criticism. For instance, paraphrasing Widdowson (1998, 162), CDA lacks unified methods, and terminology can be confusing. In addition, Widdowson notes that writer’s political stances and pre-existing ideas might creep their way in the analysis and influence the result of the research which then calls to question the objectivity of the research (1998,164–165). However, it is worth noting that this applies to all research. Any research outside of CDA can also be subjective, especially when the writer feels close to the topic at hand and is motivated by the importance of the issue. By acknowledging the goals and means of the research employing CDA, it is possible to stay as objective as possible.

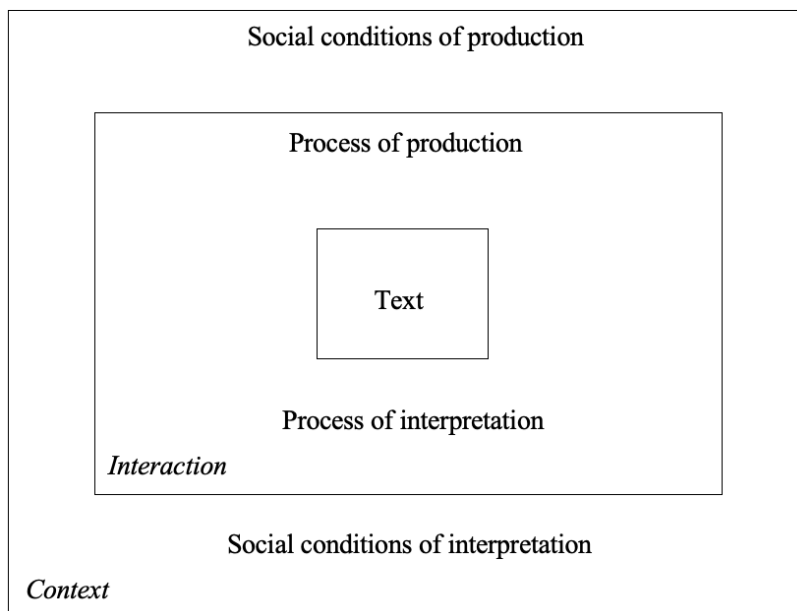
CDA is still a viable field and valid in research. The criticism is taken into account in this thesis by defining terms that are used and using an established theory of CDA by Fairclough. I strive for objectivity by acknowledging my own political stance as a writer and not letting it interfere with the research. The analysis conducted within the limits of the theoretical framework and commentary of the data is provided only after it has been presented and analyzed.

3.1.1 Fairclough’s three-dimensional model

Norman Fairclough’s ([1989] 2015) three-dimensional model was developed in the 1980s and it has become a widespread approach within the field of CDA. The premise of the three-dimensional model is that language and discourse are layered and are a part of society and not external to it (Fairclough [1989] 2015, 22). According to him, “in seeing language as discourse and social practice, one is committing oneself not just to analyzing texts, nor just to analyzing processes of production and interpretation, but to analyzing the relationship

between texts, processes, and their social conditions” (ibid.). Figure 1 visualizes the connection between the dimensions.

Figure 1. The different dimensions and their relations in discourse as text, interaction and context as illustrated by Fairclough ([1989] 2015, 58).



In this thesis, I refer to the different levels as the *text dimension*, *discursive practice dimension* and the *social practice dimension* to keep the terminology clear as Fairclough’s terminology changes slightly between subsequent editions of his original 1989 book. This thesis builds largely on the 3rd edition.

The core of the three-dimensional model is the text dimension. It is concerned with the text and word level itself, for example lexical choices, implications or grammatical structures in the text. Addressing word choices, he provides questions that can be followed in the text analysis and this thesis follows one of them as modified below:

What ideologically significant meaning relations (*synonymy*, *hyponymy*, *antonymy*) are there between words? (Fairclough [1989] 2015, 129–130)

In his view, word choices are marked by experiential values that reflect particular ways of understanding and representing the world, essentially illustrating the producer’s experience of the world (Fairclough [1989] 2015, 130). Inspired by this, I employ synonymy, hyponymy and antonymy as analytical tools for analyzing the text dimension to see the different meaning relations words have in the data. Summarizing Fairclough ([1989] 2015, 115, 133–134), synonyms, words with the same meaning, can also affect how a message is received, whereas,

opposite to synonyms, antonyms contrast words by offering word with opposite meanings, such as ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’, while hyponyms offer more specificity to its umbrella term, i.e. hypernym (for example: ‘father’ is a hyponym for the hypernym ‘parent’) that subsumes them. Analyzing these meaning relations can reveal how the speaker emphasizes certain things over others based on ideology or their view on the world.

The second dimension in Fairclough’s ([1989] 2015) model addresses how a text interacts with those who consume it and what its manner of production and distribution are like. This dimension is also called the discursive practice dimension, which is used in this thesis as it includes all the processes mentioned above in a concise manner. In the second dimension the focus is on how the text is subjected to interpretation by the recipients. Essentially, this dimension investigates the processes of production that are used to achieve certain goals, and Fairclough uses “the term *interpretation* both as the name of the stage in the procedure, and for the interpretation of texts by discourse participants” ([1989] 2015, 155). In addition, one aspect in this dimension is *intertextuality*. According to Blommaert and Bulcan (2000, 449), Fairclough differentiates “manifest intertextuality” from “constitutive intertextuality”. The former involves explicitly drawing on other people’s work, whereas the latter involves “texts that are made up of heterogeneous elements: generic conventions, discourse types, register, style” (ibid.). A major factor in intertextuality is how quotations are altered and recontextualized for the purposes of another text (ibid.). For this thesis, overt intertextuality is not in the focus as the data mostly relies on discussing previous events and then recontextualizing them. This thesis deals more with a digital, algorithm-driven and socially interactive space in which recontextualization, genre-hybridity, implications and engagement practices are the relevant discursive practices.

Lastly, the social practice dimension refers to the different social conditions that are constitutive of discourse. Fairclough’s premise for this dimension is “that social conditions determine properties of discourse” ([1989] 2015, 53). He also emphasizes that language and society work in tandem as “there is not an external relationship ‘between’ language and society, but an internal and dialectical relationship” and that “[l]anguage is a part of society; linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of a special sort” (Fairclough [1989] 2015, 56). Conversely, “social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena” which highlights the duality of the relation between language and society (ibid.). This duality is an important aspect in this thesis as the social (and political) context affects what is said and what is said affects the people in that social context. In addition, ideologies are in a key role in this

dimension as it is a tool for exercising power over groups. Ideologies are in the focus in the present thesis and section 4.2.2 presents ideologies in more detail.

Like CDA practices in general, Fairclough's ([1989] 2015) approach has received criticism. The general criticism towards CDA (introduced earlier in section 3.1) applies here as well. In addition, it has been criticized for its complexity and potential difficulties in operating such a vast framework in different types of data (Blommaert and Bulcan 2000). The clearcut division between three levels has received criticism as separating these elements is often impossible due to the intersecting nature of text, discourse and social practice. The extensiveness of the framework can, however, also be an asset in research when keeping in mind the limitations and intersecting dimensions. For this thesis, the social and discursive practices are essential for the analysis on ideologies as the data is heavily bound in its context which reflects certain values and ideals of the society in which the discourse constituted. To maintain the analysis as clear as possible, the text dimension is analyzed first with these conceptual tools, while the discursive and social practice dimensions are discussed together as the separation proved to be unfruitful for this thesis. The following section introduces the tools for analyzing these two levels.

3.1.2 Toolkit for analyzing persuasion

The discursive practice level in Fairclough's ([1989] 2015) model can be analyzed in different ways. In this thesis, I chose to examine it in terms of persuasion as one core aspect in the videos by McEntee in the Date Right Stuff account is the persuasive and ideological nature of the content. In addition, this accounts for the interpretation side of discursive practice as the viewers must be aware of McEntee's rhetoric and delivery in the videos. Essentially, the videos are posted to a company account, which means that the data can be classified as advertising. The analysis focuses on the persuasion angle and ideologies relate to that rather than only looking at how marketing is done in the videos. Persuasion and manipulation can be analyzed through various frameworks. In this thesis, I utilize a modified toolkit inspired by van Dijk's (2006) triangulation framework. This thesis utilizes his framework as it offers clear conceptual tools for analysis, but without having to use the entire framework. Moreover, it introduces another voice to the theory in addition to Fairclough's. In what follows, I first start by defining persuasion and then move onto presenting the tools for analyzing persuasion.

Persuasive language has existed as long as humans have. However, the way persuasion happens through language changes with time (Halmari and Virtanen 2005, 237). As discussed

in sections 2.1 and 2.2, social media has changed the way marketing and influencing is done, which suggest changes in the way persuasion happens in marketing discourse. Advertising is a persuasive genre. However, all language use could arguably be categorized as persuasive. For this thesis the following, more concise definition by Virtanen and Halmari is applied: “we limit the definition of persuasion to all linguistic behavior that attempts to either *change* the thinking or behavior of an audience, or to *strengthen* its beliefs, should the audience already agree” (2005, 3). Persuasive language can also be considered manipulative, especially if there is malicious intent involved. It can, however, be challenging to separate or distinguish persuasion and manipulation from each other, especially as messages are received and interpreted differently by recipients. According to van Dijk, “[t]he boundary between (illegitimate) manipulation and (legitimate) persuasion is fuzzy, and context dependent: some recipients may be manipulated by a message that is unable to manipulate others” (2006, 361). In his view, “many forms of commercial, political or religious persuasion may formally be ethically legitimate but people may still feel manipulated by it” (van Dijk 2006, 362), which further emphasizes the subjective experience of the recipient and the blurriness of the boundary between persuasion and manipulation. Regardless of the mixture of the two, he offers the following three-category definition for manipulation and manipulation analysis (van Dijk 2006, 359):

1. Socially, manipulation is defined as illegitimate domination confirming social inequality.
2. Cognitively, manipulation as mind control involves the interference with processes of understanding, the formation of biased mental models and social representations such as knowledge and ideologies.
3. Discursively, manipulation generally involves the usual forms and formats of ideological discourse, such as emphasizing Our good things, and emphasizing Their bad things.

The idea of manipulation is a central element in CDA practice and analysis of discursive power abuse (van Dijk 2006). There is no systematic theory for analyzing manipulation per se. I have, however, sought to limit my definitions and analytical tools to fit the purposes of this thesis. Firstly, the cognitive aspect is minimally analyzed in this thesis as it is nearly impossible to evaluate the recipients’ cognitive abilities or their media literacy. This thesis can merely suggest if some tactics employed in the data could be more persuasive towards

some people more than others. However, suggesting such is not necessarily particularly fruitful in this thesis. Secondly, some of the tools presented by van Dijk (2006) overlap with other dimensions in Fairclough's ([1989] 2015) framework and it would be repetitive if used as they are presented. Lastly, the scope of the thesis limits how many aspects can be analyzed.

Van Dijk (2006) offers an extensive list of strategies that persuasive and manipulative discourse employs, which than can be assessed in speech or writing. The data analyzed in this thesis pertains to anti-progressive discourse, which is why I find his toolkit suitable for this thesis. Taking cues from his work, I focus on:

1. Manifestation of right-wing ideologies (us and them rhetoric)
2. Humor, sarcasm, and wordplay
3. Implied meanings
4. Recontextualization

These categories combine with strategies that pertain to positive self-representation and negative representation of others. It is common for people to characterize an in-group, i.e. 'us', by using positive attributes and, conversely, an out-group, i.e. 'them', by using negative attributes, as identified by van Dijk (2005, 2006, 2011). To be clear, the positive and negative attribution linked to pronouns does not pertain merely to oneself or some other person, i.e. to 'I' or 'you', but to large groups of people that one associates or disassociates with, i.e. to 'us', 'we' and 'our' or 'they', 'them' and 'their', as specified by Atkinson (1984, 37–45).

Overall, analyzing persuasion and manipulation are important for this thesis for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it provides an answer to the second research question, especially as the videos cannot be understood as traditional marketing. Therefore, focusing on persuasion is a concrete way to navigate the genre-bending videos in context. Secondly, persuasion analysis supports the analysis of ideologies, as the persuasion tactics are intertwined with the ideological discourse and are a part of it as tools for arousing emotional responses in viewers. Lastly, persuasive language and discourse in social media is a fruitful area of research for fully understanding how language can be used as a tool for reaching visibility and possibly higher status within the social media sphere and even in the world outside of it.

4 Materials and methods

In this section, I explain the data analyzed in this thesis and describe the data collection process. First, in section 4.1, I elaborate on what type of data I have included and then discuss why and how this specific data was chosen for this study. Second, in section 4.2, I elaborate on the relevant methodologies. I explain close listening and close reading in section 4.2.1., ideologies in section 4.2.2. and implicatures in section 4.2.3.

4.1 Materials

The data analyzed in this study consists of 80 short videoclips from the TikTok account @daterightstuff which is the official account of the conservative dating app Date Right Stuff. The videos are less than thirty seconds long, meaning that each video consist of a couple of sentences on average. All the videos feature the same person, John McEntee, who is one of the founders of the Right Stuff app and a former aide to Donald Trump (Pengelly 2024). McEntee speaks to the camera usually while eating something or sometimes walking outside in a casual environment which seems to imitate a date setting. McEntee is the focus in the videos and is referred to throughout the analysis. The topics he discusses revolve around current issues in the American political field. For instance, abortion, climate change, racism, immigration, and LGBTQ+ rights are recurring themes in the videos.

I collected the videos between February 2, 2024, to March 30, 2024, which is when I encountered the videos, and it piqued my interest with their striking formatting. There were no other specific criteria for the timeline as the videos follow the same general structure at any given time. However, I did have criteria for the data collection itself as presented here:

1. The videos must be posted by the official Date Right Stuff account in their front page which does not include reposts, stiches or duets which are all features in the TikTok platform.
2. No comments or other user or viewer generated content are included to keep the content relevant and the users anonymous.
3. The videos must have audio. Some videos during the chosen timeline have their audio removed so I chose not to include them to keep the data consistent.
4. All topics are allowed if the discussion cannot be easily traced back to private persons or specific vulnerable groups.

The ethical considerations in this thesis mostly concern the gathering of data. The ethical questions have to do with the privacy of private persons connected to the social media content or the app (followers, commenters, users etc.). The privacy of third parties is protected by only using app content featuring John McEntee. The content is public and meant as marketing. McEntee is the spokesperson for Date Right Stuff and a public figure with a large following. Therefore, the video content can be used for analysis. No harm is meant to him or directed at the app. Instead, this thesis strives to be as objective as possible in its analysis of language and discourse in its context.

4.2 Methods

This section presents the methodologies of close listening and close reading as the methods for fully understanding the data presented in section 4.2.1. I explain ideologies in section 4.2.2 and elaborate on implicatures in section 4.2.3.

4.2.1 Close listening and close reading

The familiarization to the data was done by close listening of the videos and then close reading of the transcribed material. The data was collected by listening to the video audios after which the audio data is transcribed with the help of video captions. Close reading comes into play when the transcribed data is analyzed, especially as meanings are conveyed differently, for example overtly and covertly. According to Brummett “*close reading is the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings*” (2019, 2; italics as in the original). In his view, “a reader is a *meaning detective*” (Brummett 2019, 7). Looking for meanings and making connections to the world around us is therefore crucial to understanding language. This applies to analyzing the data in this thesis as it is central to understand ideological language and persuasion strategies.

4.2.2 Ideologies

Various terms and concepts come with a plethora of definitions, which makes it virtually impossible to find a universal definition that everyone agrees with. *Ideology* is no exception in this regard. It is marked with a certain confusion when defining and using it. However, according to van Dijk “despite the controversies and the many different approaches to the concept of ideology, the historical terms of the debate remain remarkably similar” (1998, 11) which suggest some common ground in the existing definitions. Marx, Engels, Gramsci and

Althusser are few of the names that remain associated with it (ibid.). Van Dijk summarizes that “ideologies may be very succinctly defined as the *basis of the social representations shared by members* of a group” (1998, 17; italics as in the original). This means groups can base their beliefs on this notion and build a world view accordingly. He also mentions that ideologies are often self-serving and in interest of the group in question (ibid.). These elements used by him in defining ideology are shared by many scholars. Hall defines ideology similarly as:

By ideology I mean the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works. (Hall 1996, 29).

The discourse and power angle are often related to the discussion of ideologies, and they are also central to this thesis. According to Fairclough:

Ideological power, the power to project one’s practices as universal and ‘common sense’, is a significant complement to economic and political power, and of particular significance here because it is exercised in discourse. (Fairclough [1989] 2015, 64).

This emphasizes how ideologies are a part of discourse and work in tandem to persuade others. Fairclough often focuses on capitalist societies when discussing language and ideology as ideologies often are embedded in the structure of these societies ([1989] 2015, 67). In relation to this, he also argues that “there are for instance certain key discourse types which embody ideologies which legitimize, more or less directly, existing societal relations, and which are so salient in modern society that they have ‘colonized’ many institutional orders of discourse” (ibid.). This angle is apt for this thesis as the United States is a capitalist society and the Date Right Stuff app is a consumer good that is advertised on social media. In addition, the videos are produced from the viewpoint of a conservative Republican who presents himself and his inside group in a certain light that relies on ideologies and their reinforcement through social media. It can be argued that McEntee exercises power he has over his viewers in the process as he has a large following and he is involved in the current political changes that are happening in the US.

4.2.3 Implicatures

As the data I analyze in this thesis is often implicative in nature, I believe a definition and acknowledgment of implied meanings is in order. This is not a new framework or a tool for analysis, per say, but rather a clarification on what I mean when I discuss implications throughout the analysis. H. P. Grice offers a concise definition for implied meanings which I follow in this thesis.

In summary, Grice's ([1975] 1989) theory of pragmatics relies on what he refers to as the *Cooperative Principle*, according to which our conversational efforts should be as clear as possible and follow the purpose of the conversation making the interaction more effective. His principle contains four conversational Maxims that illustrate how to keep the conversation purposeful by being informative (Quantity), being truthful (Quality), being relevant (Relevance) and being clear and orderly (Manner) (ibid.). However, speakers do not always follow these principles and might opt out from using them to achieve certain goals. In fact, there are people who happily ignore this principle, while also taking advantage of how most people adhere to it (Lecerle 1989).

In Grice's ([1975] 1989) view, utterances have conventional meanings that help to determine what is implied as the meaning of utterances might otherwise be unclear, leaving more room for assumptions and even misunderstanding. According to Davis ([2005] 2024), “[i]mplicature... [e]fficiency” and “[k]nowledge of common forms of implicature is acquired along with one's native language”. The implied meanings can, however, go beyond their conventional meanings, as emphasized by Grice ([1975] 1989). They can therefore be utilized strategically, to convey multiple meanings to multiple parties by exploiting the maxim of manner, by being deliberately obscure, so that only some can understand the message the way it was intended by the speaker, while others cannot, as acknowledged by Grice ([1975] 1989, 36–37). This allows for calculated ambivalence (Engel and Wodak 2013) and dogwhistling (Fox 2025), which grant the speaker plausible deniability (Sengul 2022b).

5 Analysis

This section answers the research question by conducting the analysis on the material presented in section 4.2. I look at the text dimension of the framework through vocabulary by analyzing (implied) synonymy, hyponymy and antonymy. These aspects carry ideological leanings, reinforcing present ideals, which is relevant to the first research question. The discursive aspects of the three-dimensional model are analyzed in section 5.2 through the discussion of persuasive strategies in the language with the toolkit presented in the theoretical framework section. The social dimension of Fairclough's ([1989] 2015) model is discussed together with the discursive practice level. Initiating my analysis, I started by separating the two and after a while I noticed that the separation felt too arbitrary and resulted in repetitive discussions. Thus, I find that discussing the *social context* in which the discourse happens in suffices for the purposes of this thesis.

I answer the following research questions in this section and expand on them in the discussion section:

1. How are conservative ideologies reinforced in the Date Right Stuff application's social media marketing videos?
2. How do the Date Right Stuff application's videos persuade or manipulate the viewer?

It is also worth mentioning that even though the analysis of text and the discursive and social elements are separated, most of the analyzed elements occur simultaneously and work in tandem to create multileveled discourse. This aspect is further discussed in the following sections when needed and acknowledged further at the end of the analysis section.

5.1 Textual analysis

In this section, I focus on the text itself and analyze McEntee's word choices in the videos uploaded to the Date Right Stuff TikTok account. I analyze the implicit and explicit use of synonyms, hyponyms and antonyms as they can be revealing of opinionated or ideologically loaded language. The focus is on how McEntee uses words and concepts to associate certain groups of people with positive and negative attributes (Atkinson 1984; van Dijk 2005, 2006, 2011), as well as to create tension with the opposition, and how he uses specified language that reproduces conservative ideologies. In addition to direct use of synonyms, hyponyms and antonyms, McEntee often expresses his views indirectly through implication which is why

some synonym, hyponym and antonym relations are implied rather than explicitly stated. Firstly, in section 5.1.1, I focus on synonyms and implied synonymy as McEntee implicitly synonymizes people and events. Moving on to section 5.1.2, I discuss hyponyms that refer to a more specific word choice under a general umbrella term. Specification at this level is revealing of attitudes the speaker has towards the subject at hand. Lastly, McEntee uses polarizing and contrasting language, which I analyze in section 5.1.3 through antonyms, or are words with opposite meanings.

5.1.1 Synonymy

Synonyms can be used to convey different nuances in language and can reveal positive and negative attitudes on different topics. Sometimes words can be used like synonyms even when they are not strictly speaking synonyms in the way ‘happy’ and ‘joyful’ are, for instance. McEntee often synonymizes people, groups and institutions to convey an opinion which reinforces his values and ideologies. The following table demonstrates some of the synonyms that are present in the data

Table 1. Examples of synonyms and implied synonymy in the data compared to more neutral/ general terms.

#	General term	Synonym in data
1	We (conservatives, Republicans)	Cult
2	Government	Robbers
3	Immigrants/ refugees	Illegal aliens, 10 million people unvaccinated, unemployed
4	Genders	Twin Towers
5	Democrat	Elite billionaire
6	Women	Ladies

Synonym pair 1 in Table 1 appears in the data in the context of ‘we’ as in conservatives or Republicans being independent thinkers:

- (1) Yeah, I’m in cult, we brainwash people to think for themselves.

In this example, the synonymy is implied rather than clearly stated. The term “cult” is sometimes applied to describe political parties to suggest a negative, hive-minded mentality among their members. McEntee uses this accusation or negative attribute as a positive trait and synonymizes himself and conservatives with it to show pride and to take power away

from the usually ill-intended accusation of cult behavior. He strengthens his own identity as a part of the group while simultaneously reinforcing the idea of conservatives as a group that proudly separates themselves from others, especially from people who they deem to follow the crowd or, for example, the government of whom conservatives often are critical of.

The second synonym pair “government” and “robbers” is a direct criticism towards the US government and their actions when it comes to taxation policies and government spending:

- (2) The difference between the government and robbers is that robbers don't pretend they're helping you.

Government and robbers are blatantly synonymized and compared to each other to delegitimize the government and reinforce the idea of an untrustworthy governing body. The premise is that the government is like a group of robbers, but with even less integrity. While robbers do not pretend to be anything other than what they are, the government disguises its actions. In this sense, the government is presented as synonymous with robbers but with even less morality than what robbers are thought to have.

Synonym pair 3 in Table 1 refers to two examples from the data as McEntee often opts for a synonym or an ideologically loaded word used as a synonym for refugee or immigrant:

- (3) The mayor of New York city is giving illegal aliens prepaid credit cards, great, since I'm actually an American citizen does that mean I'm getting a platinum card?
- (4) The same people that forced you to get vaccinated to keep your job then let in 10 million people who were unvaccinated and unemployed.

In example 3, McEntee uses the term “illegal aliens” to refer to immigrants that come to the United States and get government aid, such as prepaid phones. “Illegal aliens” delegitimizes and dehumanizes immigrants and refugees to intruder-like entities that have no legitimate right to be in the United States. This is further contrasted and reinforced with the comparison to McEntee being “actually an American citizen”, which strengthens his identity as an American while simultaneously implying that immigrants cannot be actual Americans.

Example 4 is different from example 3 in the sense that McEntee's word choices not strict synonyms but are used as synonyms to refer to and describe immigrants and refugees. It is essentially criticism of the government, but immigrants and refugees are not recognized either. Moreover, McEntee acknowledges that immigrants are people by referring to the 10

million people coming to America, unlike in example 3. However, there is no indication of acknowledgment of their immigrant or refugee status or their reasons for coming to America. Their status is reduced to them being “unvaccinated” and “unemployed”, which he uses to imply that being an immigrant is often synonymous with these two things. This example manifests and reinforces several right-wing ideologies at once, including criticism towards immigration, the government and vaccination policies that are common especially among religious conservatives and the reactionary and radical right (Corcoran, Scheitle and DiGregorio 2021; Gerretsen et al. 2021; van Dijk 2024).

Synonym pair 4 in Table 1 synonymizes gender identity with the collapsed World Trade Centre Twin Towers:

- (5) Genders are like the Twin Towers, there used to be two of them but now it’s kind of a sensitive subject

McEntee metaphorically synonymizes genders with the Twin Towers which illustrates a critical stance towards the changed understanding of gender identity and gender fluidity. McEntee implies that traditionally there are two genders, male and female which used to be an unchallenged concept. Comparing genders to the Twin Towers implies that this traditional and established view of gender has been violently attacked and collapsed as a result, a tragedy comparable to the tragedy of 9/11 terrorist attack. This comparison exemplifies a conservative backlash (Lazar 2007), which propagates traditional gender ideals and portrays the contemporary shift in attitudes as a loss of stability with the metaphorical synonymy invoking a sense of collapse or destruction.

The synonym pair in example 6 in Table 1 aims to link Democrats to the rich elite by implying elite billionaires vote a certain way:

- (6) Elite billionaires vote to raise taxes and then they move to red states to avoid paying them. If you vote for a *Democrat*, maybe you should be forced to live in a Democrat state.

The implication here is that billionaires support high taxation and thus vote for Democrats, by which McEntee most likely means that they are Democrats themselves. This in itself suggest that all Democrats are elite billionaires, not average citizens. He criticizes Democrats and the left-leaning ideal of higher taxation and supports the conservative and right-leaning ideal of lower taxation. Blue (Democrat or liberal states) are also synonymized with higher taxation and red states (Republican or conservative states) are synonymized with lower taxation.

Essentially, McEntee aims to reinforce the existing contrast between liberal and conservative policies. He attempts to expose Democrat hypocrisy by suggesting that Democrats do not want to pay the higher taxes they voted for, while also hiding his own hypocrisy, how Date Right Stuff is financed by billionaire Peter Thiel (Sengul 2025). In addition, McEntee reinforces conservative or right-wing views that favor lower taxes, less government involvement and more individuality in general by synonymizing liberals with negative attributes and conservatives with more positive ones.

The last synonym pair in Table 1, represents women as “ladies” which can carry different connotations based on context. McEntee uses “ladies” in the context of voting habits:

- (7) Ladies I know why you’re doing this, but can you please stop voting Democrat and just find alternative ways to disappoint your father.

Women and ladies are often used interchangeably. However, in this context using “ladies” instead of women creates a more informal, joking and patronizing feel to his statement. The term is often associated with politeness, especially in a more traditional view which he aims to establish. Approaching this from a conservative viewpoint, he mocks the idea that women overwhelmingly vote Democrat and wants to give “ladies” advice on their voting habits. He is essentially telling women what they should do which can come across as patronizing and paternalistic, especially as he is advising women on how not to disappoint their fathers. In this example, he suggests that voting Democrat is going to disappoint their Republican fathers and “ladies” should not disappoint them this way. This suggest that women are expected to and therefore they should conform to their fathers’ political beliefs, as advocated within the conservatives and the right-wing circles (Klatch [1994] 2018; Llanera 2023).

In summary, McEntee uses synonymy to portray people, groups and ideas in a negative light, which reflects and reinforces his conservative stance and the right-wing ideology behind it. He uses metaphorical and implicative language to muddy the waters. In addition, he occasionally uses a negative synonym to his advantage. In example 1, he does this by flipping the cult narrative about conservatives to reinforce his in-group identity.

5.1.2 Hyponymy

A speaker can (re)produce entire meaning systems by generating a meaning for a hypernym and a number of hyponyms for it (Fairclough [1989] 2015, 115). For example, instead of using a more generic umbrella term for a group of people, a speaker can opt to use a more

specific term that categorizes that group further based on the speaker's opinions, values or ideologies. This permits an ideological sleight of hand, naturalizing what is, in fact, arbitrary, as discussed by Fairclough ([1989] 2015 115–116).

McEntee uses hyponyms to convey different meanings to different demographics. Similarly to the synonymy analysis, some of the hypernym and hyponym pairs are presented more metaphorically and implicatively, which leaves room for different interpretations. The following table exemplifies some of these hyponyms compared to possible more generic hypernyms.

Table 2. Examples of hyponyms in the data compared to their hypernyms.

#	Hypernym	Hyponyms in data
1	Children	Daughter, son
2	Man/ male	Straight white male
3	Car	Electric car
4	Parents, caretakers	Mom, dad

While hypernyms are by definition less specific than hyponyms, as illustrated in table 2, hypernyms can be understood as subsuming the more specific meanings and implications of hyponyms, whether intended or not (Fairclough [1989] 2015, 115). In McEntee's videos, the hypernyms often imply specific underlying opinions or stances that he takes for granted, which he then contrasts with hyponyms in order to create a narrative that supports his conservative ideology. Hyponym pair 1 in Table 2 illustrates his views on sex and gender through his assessment of parenting and how it has changed:

- (8) Parenting goals: Then vs Now:
 2014: Keep your daughter off the pole and your son out of jail.
 2024: Get them to their 18th Birthday with their genitals still attached.

In example 8, McEntee employs a binary conceptualization of children by taking it for granted that they are either boys or girls. This is further reinforced by implying that daughters and sons are at risk of undergoing gender-affirming surgery, which indirectly conveys an opposing stance on these procedures in general. By specifying the genders of children in this context, he reinforces a markedly conservative idea of a gender binary (Prusaczyk and Hodson 2020) and what it means to be a daughter or a son, as well as a parent.

Hyponym pair 2 in Table 2 appears in the context of McEntee criticizing college admission protocols and how school systems operate according to him:

- (9) POV: I'm a college admissions officer in 2024:
 Okay your GPA is fantastic, your SAT scores are off the charts and the charity started unbelievable, there's just one problem, you're a straight white male.

In example 9, the caption in the video introduces a scenario in which McEntee adopts the point of view (POV in transcription) of a college admissions officer and speaks about a fictional student's credentials. With the hyponym "straight white male" McEntee highlights qualities in a person, specifically a man, that are socially charged and carry connotations that can be seen as negative depending on the context. While using the hypernym male or man would have a similar effect and convey the same underlying point in this context, the additional details of sexual orientation and ethnicity further reinforce the idea of straight white males being victims of the current systems, which is a common narrative especially among the far-right (Pelinka 2017; Sengul 2022a, 2022b). This serves as commentary on issues of diversity and gender privilege which are presented as issues particularly effecting straight white males, echoing fears about the erosion of patriarchal norms. In doing so, he reproduces conservative and right-leaning ideologies that present the push for diversity and equity as a threat to traditional power structures. The following example, hyponym pair 3, moves to a different topic and appears in the following example:

- (10) If you can't afford gas, just buy an 80 000-dollar electric car ya dummy.

McEntee mentions an "electric car" instead of merely "car", which creates contrast between two different types of cars and their qualities. With this distinction, McEntee is pointing out tension between these categories that effects Americans from the standpoint of money and spending. This commentary on cars critiques gas prices, car prices, and possibly climate actions as the more environmentally sustainable electric car is inaccessible to most Americans. Highlighting electric cars instead of just cars in general steers the discussion into criticism and mockery of wealthy eco-conscious people, which is also a known populist narrative among the far-right (Küppers 2024; Tormis, Pettersson and Sakki 2024). They are the opposite of who McEntee speaks for in his videos. By presenting the two as seemingly interchangeable, he reinforces his own conservative stance on wealth, high prices and climate change.

5.1.3 Antonymy

Antonyms are words that have opposite meanings which makes it possible to convey opinions and implications on different topics. As already established, McEntee uses polarizing language, and antonyms can concretely show these divisions that are often ideologically motivated, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Examples of antonyms in the data based on their implied positive and negative attributes.

#	Positive term	Negative term
1	Homeschooling	Government run schooling
2	Church/religion	Drag Queen Story Hour
3	White man	Shooter
4	Animals	Humans

McEntee presents words as antonyms. This conveys a stance on the matter at hand and often reflects his conservative values. For example, antonym pairs 1 and 2 in Table 3 suggest that schooling in the United States is in crisis as children are introduced to different education styles:

- (11) Homeschooling is not an experiment people have been homeschooled for thousands of years, government run schooling is the experiment and that experiment has gone to shit.
- (12) So, taking kids to church is indoctrinating them with religion but taking them to Drag Queen Story Hour is educational?

In example 11, “homeschooling” and “government run schooling” are presented as polar opposites. Homeschooling is suggested to be the non-experimental form of education whereas government run schooling is presented as a relatively recent experiment that has failed. This example also reflects the dislike and distrust of government among conservatives (Brown 2021; Grogan 2019).

In example 12, “church” and “religion” are contrasted to “Drag Queen Story Hour”. McEntee implies that Drag Queen Story Hour is an antonym to church and religion by suggesting that Drag Queen Story Hour is more harmful to children than taking them to church. He emphasizes this difference by using words such as ‘indoctrinating’ and ‘educational’ while also flipping the negative and positive attributes according to his conservative view on the

matter. In other words, these word choices suggest that he believes that practicing religion and going to church is genuinely educational, whereas Drag Queen Story Hour is indoctrination, not the other way around.

In both examples, 11 and 12, McEntee expresses concern over children's education and safety and aims to present certain aspect of education as antonyms to more traditional or conservative ways of teaching children. This reinforces the conservative stance that education should align with religious values, opposing the more progressive influences in schooling that favor providing gender and sex education in schools (Hurst et al. 2024; Montegary 2022).

Antonym pair 3 “shooter” and “white man” strongly implies that there is a simple way to recognize shooters based on their appearance:

- (13) Good rule of thumb if they don't immediately tell you who the shooter is, he's not a white male.

In this example, McEntee suggests that “shooter” is an antonym for “white male” when a shooter's identity is not disclosed to the public. He implies that white males are not shooters or are less likely to be shooters while suggesting that other ethnicities or people of color are. Contrasting white males and shooters as an unlikely association echoes attitudes of white supremacy and the implicitly synonymizes people of color, especially immigrants, with criminality and violence, which is a commonly held view in right-wing circles (van Dijk 2024), even though there is little evidence that support that view (Pendergast, Wadsworth and LePree 2018) as criminality and violence is rather linked to social and economic disadvantages (Trujillo and Vélez 2018).

Antonym pair 4 illustrates attitudes towards leadership and what McEntee's stance is on what kind of leaders there are in America or even world-wide:

- (14) What's the difference between humans and animals?
Animals would never let the dumbest ones lead the pack.

McEntee suggests that humans are no better than animals, in fact unintelligent compared to animal behavior. While humans and animals are not strict antonyms in a technical sense (as humans are biologically animals), the contrast in the statement suggest this and creates an opposition to illustrate how he feels about leadership and human intelligence. He is implicitly saying that humans are indeed letting the “dumbest ones lead the pack”. Thus, another possible oppositional pair is *smart* versus *dumb* even though smart is not explicitly stated.

These adjectives aim to describe and contrast leaders, especially in the United States during President Biden’s administration. McEntee therefore implies that the administration is not intelligent and the people who voted them there are not either. In other words, he espouses populist, anti-elitist sentiment according to which a political class elects itself to positions of power, only to betray the people they claim to serve (Gerbaudo 2023).

The analysis of antonym pairs in the selected examples reveals how linguistic contrasts are used to convey opinion and to construct ideological meaning. McEntee often implies contrast between words, which makes detecting them more challenging. Across all the examples, antonyms are not just neutral linguistic tools but rhetorical devices in the text that reinforce conservative perspectives. This analysis highlights how McEntee’s linguistic choices contribute to broader ideological messaging embedded in these contrasted terms and the underlying ideas. It is also worth noting that in some of the examples, synonymy, hyponymy and antonymy might simultaneously imply several meanings. For instance, in example 3 immigrants were synonymized as “illegal aliens” while “illegal aliens” or immigrants were antonyms to “American citizens” as well. These intertwining meaning relations create ideologically loaded language that can be difficult to unpack, especially when they are included in videos that last only a few seconds.

5.2 Discourse and Social Practice Analysis: Strategies of Persuasion

In this chapter, I analyze the discursive practice dimension and the social practice dimensions of Fairclough’s ([1989] 2015) three-dimensional model. The focus is on how McEntee’s videos are produced to be persuasive, distributed to spread conservative ideologies and consumed by audiences that need to deduce the meaning. The social practice angle is combined with the analysis of discursive practice to avoid repetition as the two dimensions are intertwined to the extent it would be arbitrary to separate them completely.

In each example, I acknowledge the discursive and social context(s) to achieve a deeper analysis of ideologies and persuasive tactics. When analyzing the discursive practices, I mostly focus on the production and distribution side of the discourse as the data is limited to McEntee’s language use and how it spreads freely on social media. The interpretation or consumption aspect is discussed in relation to implications that are relevant to target audiences and how his viewers must continuously decipher and draw conclusions from what he says. In summary, I analyze the following persuasion tactics in the data:

1. Manifestation of right-wing ideologies: us and them (section 5.2.1)
2. Humor, sarcasm and wordplay (section 5.2.2)
3. Implied meanings (section 5.2.3)
3. Recontextualization (section 5.2.4)

In section 5.2.1, I focus on the manifestation of different right-wing ideologies in the videos that are ground for the whole nature of the videos. Section 5.2.2 is dedicated to analyzing how McEntee appeals to emotions and attitudes of his viewers to keep them watching. In section 5.2.3, I discuss implied meanings as persuasive devices and how they are present throughout the different levels of analysis. Lastly, in section 5.2.4, I investigate recontextualization and how it functions as a persuasive device that aims to shape narratives to fit the agenda of the videos. Each category mentioned above is analyzed with the help of examples from the data. It is important to keep in mind that the examples most likely employ more than one of the strategies which creates a more complex and persuasive message. The examples are therefore illustrative of persuasion strategies, while the connection of all the strategies is discussed at the end of the analysis. I analyze the examples by first describing the example, followed by providing a social context for the discourse and discussing how the persuasion strategies manifest in the example. By doing so, the analysis remains concise, while it also accounts for both the discursive and social dimensions.

5.2.1 Manifestation of right-wing ideologies: us vs. them

The main component of McEntee's videos is reproducing different conservative and right-wing discourses and ideologies that aim to persuade the viewer. McEntee implies a divide strong division between 'us vs. them' (Atkinson 1984; van Dijk 2005, 2006, 2011), which strengthens his conservative stance. The persuasive power relies in how he positions societal issues within an ideological frame that encourages viewers to see these divisions with people who are a part of 'us', in this case conservatives, Republicans and average American citizens, and 'them', people who somehow threaten the conservative lifestyle. In addition, this juxtaposition primes the audience to be more receptive to other persuasion tactics, such as humor (section 5.2.2) or recontextualizations (section 5.2.3) as there is a foundation for these discussions.

In this section, I focus on how the right-wing ideologies are present in the data: how McEntee represents ‘them’ in a negative light while implying positive representations of ‘us’. I started the analysis by going through the examples and identifying different right-wing ideologies within the examples. This resulted in different number of attitudes that can be interpreted from the examples. These interpretations are based on the definitions of conservatism and right-wing attitudes (presented in section 2) and are more illustrative of the ideologies McEntee discusses:

Table 4. A visualization of right-wing ideologies manifested by McEntee and the total number of occurrences throughout the whole dataset.

Right-wing ideology	Number of instances out of 80 videos
Anti-government	27
Anti-immigration/ anti-inclusion	17
Anti-Liberal/ Democrat	15
Anti-trans	14
Anti-feminism	8
Anti-vaccine/ Anti-pharma	7
Anti-climate change	6
Anti-gun control	4
Anti-abortion/ Pro-life	2

These ideologies, often marked as being against something (van Dijk 2024), are present nearly in all the videos and illustrate what McEntee presents as threats to him and conservatives in general. I discuss these ideologies with examples from the data. Given the volume of material, only a selection of representative examples is included, and some earlier examples are repurposed. Each example illustrates several overlapping ideologies or stances which are discussed within their respective contexts.

Firstly, anti-government attitudes come up most in the videos and the criticality towards the United States government often relates to government spending, who is the recipient of government funds and who are the people making decisions. To preface the social context of these examples, at the beginning of 2024 as the videos were uploaded, Democrat President Joe Biden’s administration was in office, which most likely affects how and why McEntee presents anti-government stances. Several videos in the data critique Democrats and liberal ideas which is then echoed in the critical tone of the 2024 administration. The following examples demonstrate anti-government attitudes and criticality towards the people in charge:

- (15) It's funny how Congress who doesn't know how to balance a budget knows how to make themselves millionaires.
- (16) This is a serious question, when did our government become a retirement home for old geriatric warmongers?
- (17) Instead of using AI to pretend everyone in history was black, can we use it to read those 10 000-page bills so politicians can't hide stuff from us anymore?

In example 15, McEntee criticizes the spending by the US Congress, the legislative branch of the Government. He is critical of where the money is going within in the Congress and how budgeting it to serve the people is unsuccessful. In the social context, this attitude stems from the traditional right-wing belief that the government does not have the public's best interest in mind, and they are only concerned with themselves, often at the expense of the taxpayer (Grogan 2019). His comments also tap into a populist sentiment of being on the side of the average American while criticizing the rich. This reinforces the narrative in which the Congress, and Government as a whole, are 'bad' and McEntee himself, conservatives, and all average American citizens, are good and true victims of unfair treatment (Gerbaudo 2023).

McEntee shows distrust to the government as an institution but also leans into criticizing the specific people chosen to be a part of it. In example 16, he wonders, in a populist manner, why people of older age get to be in positions of power and make seemingly erratic decisions. Socially, this exemplifies the general criticism and frustration aimed at out of touch aging career politicians and the concern it raises in the people (Gerbaudo 2023). In addition, this discussion can be directly linked to President Joe Biden in 2024, as he faced allegations of suffering from memory issues and acted seemingly incoherent in public settings (Feldscher et al. 2024). This reinforces the view that government and, by proxy, Joe Biden is a threat to conservatism and the American people in general.

Example 17 steers away from the specific critique from spending and ageism to government transparency regarding "stuff" which refers to all decisions and discussions politicians make in and outside of the government. McEntee reinforces the idea of the government as an untrustworthy body that aims to make it difficult for people to understand what politicians aim to achieve with their bills and complex legislation. In the United States social and political context, this has been a longstanding and recurring conservative throughout history, especially with controversial decisions, a famous example being the Affordable Care Act. While advocating for the bill in 2011, Nancy Pelosi uttered that the bill needs to be passed to

find out what is in it, which caused distrust and questions around massive bills that are difficult to dissect (MacGuill 2017). While Pelosi's quote was taken out of context, it illustrates the discourse around these types of large bills and the conservative concern of blindly trusting decision-makers. Example 17 echoes this similar distrust and concern as well, especially in the context of a Democrat administration. The example also includes anti-inclusion themes unrelated to government criticism as it implies that AI is used to pretend "everyone in history was black", which suggests an opposing idea to historical figures being people of color. The following example combines anti-government attitudes with anti-Liberal stances and possible anti-climate change sentiments:

- (18) Liberal logic: Our government is racist corrupt and bought out by corporations but if we give them more money they'll fix the weather.

McEntee mocks Liberals for their "Liberal logic" that is contradictory and hypocritical. This is based on the idea that Liberals support inclusivity and climate actions that he deems as unnecessary use of funds. In this context, it is worth noting that climate change is largely denied among the conservatives (Bryant and Farrell 2024). The phrase "fix the weather" trivializes climate change and climate actions to a simple hope of changing weather rather than framing it as a global environmental threat. The same underlying distrust of government spending is present here as well which reinforces the idea of an untrustworthy institution.

Moving from anti-government attitudes to the already mentioned anti-immigration stances, McEntee tends to present immigration, immigrants and refugees themselves in a negative light compared to himself or the people he considers "real" Americans. Naturally, anti-government attitudes are present when he criticizes the spending towards helping immigrants, but the focus is now more on the representation of immigration itself. In example 19, he expresses a blatant anti-immigration sentiment:

- (19) I agree everything should be electric, let's start with the border wall.

Here McEntee refers to the wall structures between Mexico and the United States which aim to reduce illegal immigration to the US from Mexico. By saying the border wall should be electric he clearly expresses his disdain towards immigration, especially illegal immigration, which he believes should be stopped by any means possible. In addition, example 4 (from section 5.1.1) illustrates anti-immigration sentiments together with anti-vaccination attitudes and government criticality. He blames the government for being hypocritical about

vaccination policies during COVID-19 pandemic as citizens were “forced” to get them whereas immigrants were “let in” without vaccinations. In addition, he is implying criticality towards vaccinations on the whole as the sentiment about the government forcing vaccinations versus suggesting them for safety reasons shows an opposing stance on the COVID-19 vaccination.

Example 20 connects anti-government and anti-Liberal stances together to comment on several different social and political institutions:

- (20) Instead of sending Pakistan millions of dollars for gender programs, can we send them millions of Liberals with gender studies degrees?

McEntee is once more critical about the government spending, especially any aid provided to foreign nations. By suggesting that Liberals with gender studies degrees should be sent away suggests irrelevancy. The mockery of (Liberal) gender programs could also be categorized as anti-feminist and anti-trans as he dismisses gender-focused initiatives and education on these topics as unnecessary. This can be linked to a conservative opposition to feminist and LGBTQ+ advocacy, as identified by van Dijk (2024). Example 21 presents anti-feminist and anti-abortion/pro-life stances:

- (21) So, a man who doesn't wanna take care of his kid is a deadbeat dad but a woman who doesn't want to is pro-choice?

This statement frames abortion as an unfair double standard. Discussion of gender roles, especially parental roles is used to present women as the ones who can opt out of parenthood via abortion whereas men cannot opt out without being accused of negligence. McEntee equates abortion with parental neglect to show illogicality and present abortion as an immoral act which allows women to escape responsibility for their children. This rhetoric leans into men's rights activism discourse in which it is often argued that men are not included in the discussions concerning parenthood (Jordan 2019), which then unfairly burdens men. This statement therefore promotes traditional and conservative view of parental responsibilities while rejecting feminist and pro-choice narratives.

The following example discusses gun-control and how it does not function well:

- (22) So, everyone's getting mad that I'm anti-gun control but if gun control worked wouldn't Chicago be one of the safest cities in America? Instead, it's a freaking war zone.

Here McEntee explicitly states that he is against gun control, which is unsurprising, considering how many conservatives are gun owners in the US (Mencken and Froese 2019). First, he suggests that his anti-gun control views make people angry, which he then attempts to retrack by stating that gun-control is not working as gun related crimes are not decreasing even with stricter gun laws. He specifically refers to Chicago where gun laws are strict, but gun violence is high. This type of correlation argument is often presented in relation to anti-gun control discussions to illustrate the inefficiency.

In summary, McEntee exhibits several traditional right-wing ideologies, rejecting government intervention, liberal policies, progressive social movements, immigration policies and other perceived threats to conservative ideology and values. By framing issues through opposition, employing the 'us' versus 'them' sentiment, he presents conservatives as defenders of freedom and tradition who are simultaneously victims at the hands of the government, liberal attitudes and progressivism. The criticism towards foreign war efforts, specifically government aid to foreign nations echoes the conservative frame of prioritizing the protection of national interests, as discussed by Sidorsky (2016). McEntee uses many anti-attitudes that are common among the right (van Dijk 2024) as rhetorical tools, not to just critique, but to actively shape how his audience perceives political and cultural battles that are taking place in the US.

5.2.2 Humor, sarcasm and wordplay

In this section I analyze how Date Right Stuff social media content uses humor, sarcasm and irony to appeal to the audience. The topics and themes that McEntee focuses on in the videos are sensitive issues relating to questions of family, sexuality and gender, education and diversity. He uses humor to discuss these issues, often in a seemingly self-deprecating manner, only to create contrasts that are surprising to the viewer.

As mentioned in section 2.2, this thesis operates under the definition that McEntee's videos are provocative rage-bait content as the way he presents ideological and emotional discourse is polarizing and aggravating. This is evident from the millions of views his videos have gathered. On one hand, he appeals to those who agree with his right-wing message, and, on the other hand, he evokes (negative) emotions and provokes reactions in those who disagree with him. The feelings and opinions of viewers are not included in this thesis and the analysis merely suggests how the videos function to provoke his audience and illustrates how this is

done through the use of humorous, sarcastic or ironic delivery. The examples in this section illustrate how McEntee aims to create a humorous feel to his statements that often resemble how jokes are structured. The following example taps into stereotypes and exaggeration for humorous effect:

- (23) McEntee: I know we just moved in, but I think our neighbors are white supremacists.
 Woman: Why?
 McEntee: I mean all the early warning signs are there, fully employed, stable home with kids, no criminal record they attend church regularly, I even heard the one guy say he distrusts the government, scary.

This example is structured as a joke that involves two people having a conversation about fictional new neighbors. McEntee seems to be impersonating a conservative person who is critical of a conservative or a Republican person who just moved into the neighborhood. The humor stems from reversing the expectations. Typically, accusations of white supremacy are based on racist behaviors and abuse of white privilege, but here McEntee turns commonly positive traits such as employment, stable home and going to church into signs of white supremacy. The punchline lies in the sarcasm as McEntee is describing traditional conservative values such as starting a family, attending church and distrusting government. In a larger social context, conservatism is sometimes criticized for its rigid values regarding these topics which he is sarcastically punching back at by mocking people who react negatively to conservative traits.

Example 24 relies on a similar structure as example 23. Many of his statements clearly reference a joke pattern that involves three people talking. The first two people follow a predictable pattern, which the third participant then breaks by delivering the punchline:

- (24) Pessimist: This class is half empty.
 Optimist: No, this class is half full.
 Liberal: The water is racist.

The pessimist and optimist provide predictable viewpoints that follow a classic metaphor setting of either seeing a glass half full or half empty. The third participant then defies the expectations by introducing an unrelated statement about racism, making the statement surprising and humorous. McEntee is essentially mocking Liberals for being overly sensitive when it comes to racism and issues of diversity. Similarly to example 23, he leans into criticizing the perceived tendency of Liberals to focus on racial issues, even in situations

where others might not detect them. The whole statement is an exaggeration that leans into political stereotypes, which amplifies the humorous effect.

The following example relies on a classic wordplay structure where a simple change in the order of the letters can alter the meaning of a word and a sentence:

- (25) Dating in 2024:
 So, have you always been a Christian?
 No, I used to be a Christina.

In example 25, McEntee creates a hypothetical situation where two people are on a date, talking about religion and whether the other person is Christian, to which the person responds with a surprising answer about a name, and possibly, a gender identity. Changing Christian to Christina is a quick, yet surprising wordplay that completely changes the topic of discussion. McEntee is commenting on the changing nature of dating and mocking name changes that most likely are related to gender affirmation.

In relation to gender affirmation and gender fluidity, McEntee continues mocking the idea of supporting transgender people and presents it as moral question disguised in sarcasm and irony:

- (26) 13-year-old: Mom I wanna get my lip pierced.
 Liberal mom: Honey you are not mature enough to make that decision. Now come on it's time for your hormone therapy.

This sarcastic exchange in example 26 juxtaposes a minor request (getting a piercing) with a major, culturally charged and sensitive decision (gender transition) for a comical effect. McEntee simultaneously ridicules Liberals for being progressive around gender issues, while also implying that he holds an opposing stance on the matter. In addition, he aims to reveal hypocrisy in the Liberal stance on gender issues through irony. He is implying that it is ironic that people who do not allow their children to have minimally body altering piercings would allow 13-year-olds to go through gender transitions. This statement relies on exaggeration as well, which highlights the punchline and amplifies the surprise factor.

Example 27 reiterates McEntee's conservative views on education. He relies heavily on sarcasm and absurdity to criticize it:

- (27) I'm really glad I learned about parallelograms instead of how to do taxes, it's really coming handy this parallelogram season.

In this example, McEntee sarcastically states that he is very happy to have learned about parallelograms, which are geometrical figures taught in mathematics, instead of how to do taxes. This sarcastic remark shows his frustration with the priorities in teaching, which he emphasizes by talking about a nonsensical “parallelogram season” in reference to tax season during which people and businesses must file their taxes with the government. His sarcastic statement is bound to resonate with his audience as the US tax system can be difficult to navigate and he suggests that there should be more focus on skills that benefit people in everyday life rather than only in the school environment. While this sentiment is shared with people across the political spectrum, his sarcastic tone echoes a conservative attitude towards the government and the public schooling system in general.

In summary, McEntee often opts for humorous and sarcastic delivery to appeal the viewer by inviting the audience to join the joke. Humor and sarcasm can evoke an emotional response especially in this type of provocative content which hooks the attention on viewers. The exaggerated liberal values make his conservative values seem reasonable.

5.2.3 Implied meanings

In this section I analyze the use of implied meanings as a tool for persuasion. To be clear, implied meanings have been discussed throughout the analysis, but here the focus is on the functions these implications have in persuasion, not just what the implication itself is.

Implicature is persuasive as it allows speakers to suggest what they want, and the interpreter must have an active role in understanding the message. Implications have different functions in persuasion which I have analyzed below.

Firstly, implicative language is used in the data to *guide the viewer to an interpretation* without explicitly saying so. All implicative statements McEntee makes could be categorized as guiding interpretation as the focus is not on what is directly said. The audience must fill in the gaps which can create the feeling that the viewer came to the conclusion themselves even though the speaker is the one planting the seed. Naturally, listeners might come to a different conclusion than the speaker intended which then potentially decreases the sway of that statement. However, this type of content still engages the viewers who must make the connection from the implication to what it refers to, which can then reinforce the ideological framing as the viewers learn to make these connections and correlations McEntee states and reinforces. The following example illustrates an implied meaning that the viewer must decipher in order to conclude what McEntee is referring to:

- (28) I am probably the wrong messenger for this but way too many people are counting calories instead of counting chemicals.

McEntee is implying in example 28 that people who keep track of their calories for dietary or lifestyle reasons but do not eat a certain way or perhaps use other substances, such as alcohol, cigarettes or drugs, are concerned with the wrong numbers. There can be several interpretations of this which can affect what the recipient feels about this statement.

Connecting this to McEntee's anti-vegan and anti-vegetarian sentiments, which are more common among conservatives than liberals (De Groeve, Bleys and Hudders 2022), he could also be suggesting that vegan options are full of chemicals and made out of unhealthy unnecessary things. This interpretation might not be as obvious without more context which exemplifies how exactly the implication works as a guide to multiple interpretations. The following example from the data give more context to the interpretation of vegan or vegetarian diet as the focus of criticism:

- (29) Vegans will combine 10 carcinogens with 50 industrial chemicals to make "food" instead of just having steak.

In example 29, McEntee states that vegan food is not real food as, according to him, it contains toxic ingredients and chemicals. If the viewer is not familiar with McEntee's content and previous statements, this interpretation might not be as clear and guides the viewer to a different interpretation. On the other hand, a viewer familiar with McEntee might conclude that he is talking about vegan food again. This, of course requires shared knowledge between McEntee and the viewer.

Considering McEntee's target audience, creating a *sense of shared knowledge* is most likely directed to conservative and Republicans and to those who already share similar sentiments. In addition, McEntee intertextually refers to events and specific instances that require the audience to have some knowledge on the topic. The following examples illustrate a way of using implications that invite the audience to be a part of a joke or require the viewer to have an understanding of what is being referenced:

- (30) I still can't believe that changing a picture on a box of pancake mix didn't result in world peace.

- (31) I don't know if anybody saw the news, but scientists are warning that within six months humanity will run out of things to call racist.

In example 30, McEntee sarcastically implies that a small gesture of changing a picture in a pancake mix packaging has no revolutionary effects on the world. In the video caption he states, “Miss you Aunt Jemima”. He is referring to the American brand, Aunt Jemima and their pancake mix package which featured a picture of a woman of color. This logo was criticized for perpetuating a racist stereotype and upkeeping a racial nostalgia dating back to slavery. As a result, it was changed to align with a more inclusive and progressive standards (Kubota 2020). The main message is that he finds these brand actions redundant or ridiculous as they do not create monumental changes or “result in world peace”. His statement persuades the recipient to be a part of this sentiment by implying that, in a world where such trivial modifications might be believed to change the world, the failure to do so is almost laughable. The phrase "I still can't believe" gives the impression that McEntee is talking about a change that, on some level, was genuinely hoped for or expected and then invites the audience to share this ironic disbelief.

In example 31, McEntee implies that accusations of racism are overused and even unfounded as there are too many things that are being called racist. In this sense, both examples 30 and 31 relate to same issue as he criticizes changing racist brand logos as being a waste of effort. The phrase “scientists are warning that within six months” mimics the way scientific reports and news headlines report about global issues such as climate change which creates irony on multiple levels. Thus, the punchline relies on the assumption that the audience recognizes the intertextual reference to traditional news rhetoric, understands the ongoing debates about racism, and the social shifts in what is considered offensive.

Implicit statements are difficult to challenge as they remain open to interpretation (Grice [1975] 1989). The speaker can appeal to ambiguity and obscurity, claiming that their words were not intended in a particular way, which helps the speaker to *avoid direct accountability*. This calculated ambivalence allows the speaker to withdraw their statement or backtrack it to being ambiguous rather than a serious statement (Engel and Wodak 2013; Sengul 2022b). The following example illustrates how even a very controversial topic can be expressed implicitly to avoid direct pushback:

- (32) So, if you spank your kid you might go to jail, but if you don't spank your kid, they might end up a Liberal. Parenting can be kinda tricky these days.

The implication in example 32 is that becoming a Liberal is the worst outcome for a child and physically disciplining to prevent this might be worth the jailtime. This makes light of

physical abuse and implies that McEntee might endorse it as a parenting method if he himself had children. However, this remains as an assumption as the statement relies on implication that can be quite easily defended against criticism. The idea that not spanking your kid leads to liberalism is sarcastic and hyperbolic rather than an explicitly stated fact or opinion.

However, the light-hearted tone creates ambiguity around what he considers to be acceptable parenting, which could also be understood as an anti-Liberal provocation designed to attract attention through controversy. The deniability and deflection of ethical concerns weakens counterarguments which can make the message more persuasive to viewers, especially for in-group members who agree or seek approval for their opinions on liberalism or even parenting.

Assessing the utility of implicatures as discursive and social tools for persuasion, I found at least the following ways in which implied meanings functions as persuasion:

1. Guiding audience interpretation
2. Creating a sense of shared knowledge
3. Avoiding accountability

Naturally, there is overlap between these different uses of implied meanings and most examples simultaneously serve multiple functions. Importantly, having to actively listen and decipher McEntee's messaging can guide viewers to different conclusions, leaving room for plausible deniability (Engel and Wodak 2013; Sengul 2022b). Understanding implicit messaging can, in turn, feel rewarding and create a sense of agreement and belonging. This is not a rigid division but rather an illustration of the role implicit language plays in persuasive discourse.

5.2.4 Recontextualization

This section moves from implications to recontextualization and how McEntee reintroduces events and concepts in new contexts to fit an ideological narrative. In doing so, McEntee alters meanings and opens new conversations around topics that might not actually relate to each other or offers simplified contexts to larger issues. This is powerful persuasion device, but it also adds a shock factor that catches viewers by surprise and keeps them engaged.

Firstly, the videos aim to *shift meanings* of events or concepts, usually in favor of the speaker's ideological views. In example 5, McEntee situates genders questions in the context of terrorist attacks. The 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers, which is a symbol of an American tragedy, is repurposed to make a statement about gender identity. Gender is framed as

something that is now destroyed, making it a tragedy comparable to an attack that threatens the safety of America. This analogy reinforces a more conservative worldview that relies on the gender binary (Prusaczyk and Hodson, 2020) and posits the discussion of gender diversity as both controversial and absurd. This comparison relies on shock value, evoking emotions ranging from astonishment to amusement. Some viewers might find the absurdity humorous whereas others might feel offended.

Recontextualization allows McEntee to draw *false equivalences* between issues that are not necessarily connected or do not belong into the same context. In example 3, McEntee reframes the situation discussed to a whole new context. Immigration policy is reframed essentially through a consumerist reward lens which makes social security provided to immigrants seem like an unfair perk rather than a social policy. McEntee also implies that immigrants are not actual citizens and therefore not entitled to social security. This dehumanizes the immigrants, while also making it seem that McEntee and other “actual American citizens” are treated unfairly. Mentioning prepaid credit cards and platinum credit cards in the same context presents social security as free credit, which works in favor of McEntee’s argument as it reinforces the negative attitude towards immigration and financial aid immigrants receive.

In the following example McEntee transfers the topic of mail in voting into the domain of another issue which creates a false comparison between the two:

(33) If people don’t cheat, why can’t we have mail in drug tests?

In example 33, McEntee is most likely talking about mail in voting and comparing it to mail in drug tests. He draws a parallel between election integrity and drug testing policies, which do not have a direct relation to each other. This analogy aims to illustrate flaws in the American voting system and further, skepticism towards election results, which reinforces the conservative talking point about election fraud and untrustworthy government. Comparing mail-in voting and mail-in drug testing creates a false equivalent as the two serve a different purpose and involve different processes. This type of analogy relies on rhetorical simplification to create a misleading comparison that reinforces distrust towards the topic at hand, for example mail-in voting. This is a powerful persuasion tactic because analogies simplify complex arguments, making them appear more intuitive and even self-evident. The

following examples implicitly compares NFL stadiums to (illegal) immigration and leans on an analogy about ticket rules:

- (34) NFL stadiums have walls and fans that haven't paid for a ticket aren't allowed in, period. Doesn't matter if you've travelled thousands of miles or if you have a little kid with you or if you cry outside the gate, they still won't let you in. Fascinating concept.

This statement reframes national borders as private property as McEntee creates an analogy between NFL stadium walls to border walls around the United States that limit illegal immigration. This creates a false equivalent between the two as immigration concerns are equated with a situation people generally accept as a non-negotiable, in this example, trying to make your way into a game without a ticket. He refers to a little kid or crying people outside of gates, which usually evokes sympathy towards them. He is quick to dismiss this in order to turn it into commentary on fairness when it comes to protecting walls. Simplifying immigration policies through the lens of stadium security aims to depict ethical and legal debates around immigration as simple issues that can be reduced to a pay-to-enter model. This reinforces the critical stance towards illegal immigration and aims to persuade the audience by offering a seemingly simple solution to a social debate that is much more complex than paying to enter another country.

McEntee uses past events to legitimize current beliefs by *bringing history to present day situations* which reinforces the traditionalist view that is associated with conservatism. As discussed in section 5.2.1, the videos suggest heavy anti-government attitudes and criticism towards the school system from McEntee, which often results in him referring to the “good old days”. Example 10 reveals how McEntee brings an old tradition to present day. It illustrates how he has not accepted the current public school system and resents the government involvement. He presents homeschooling as the historical norm and brings it to the present day as a perfect solution to educational issues and flaws in the system, even though conservatives only began to embrace it in the 1970s (Brown 2021). This sentiment is appealing as it offers a simplified solution to a problem by using arguments about the past and the present, which, in addition, makes his argument feel more authentic. However, he does not acknowledge any developments which have led to the creation of a public school system or have constrained the possibilities of homeschooling for many, which simplifies the issue and shifts the perception of modern-day schooling options. Moreover, solely reintroducing history

to the context of the present day is not a complete argument without further elaboration, which McEntee does not offer here.

In summary, McEntee recontextualizes political topics to persuade the viewer in a way that feels more organic and self-evident. The analysis showed that the recontextualizations McEntee makes work at least in the following ways:

1. Shifting meanings of concepts
2. Creating false equivalents
3. Recontextualizing and repurposing historical events for today

The persuasive power of these categories of recontextualization is based on familiarity, simplicity, understandability, and populist rhetoric that makes controversial ideas seem more straightforward. Moreover, the simplicity of the arguments does not require the viewer to be well-versed in the topic to grasp the analogies, even if they are false or weakly supported by arguments, which further reinforces the persuasive power of the videos. In addition, McEntee surprises the viewer with unexpected comparisons that create intrigue around the topics at hand. In addition, recontextualizing political or social issues can make it seem like there is hypocrisy and illogicality in decision making and governance. These types of comparisons work on the surface level when the audience's attention is grabbed as quickly as it is lost in a platform that is designed for short and quick video content.

6 Results and discussion

In this section I summarize the results of the analysis and discuss the meaning of these findings. Section 6.1 is dedicated to the results and discussing the possible aims of the videos. In addition, I reflect on if the goals are met with the type of content analyzed. In section 6.2 I move onto acknowledging the limitations of this thesis.

6.1 Results and possible goals of the videos

The analysis exemplified how McEntee's TikTok videos rely on polarizing rhetoric that aims to illustrate heated topics through provocation and opposition. It is, however, important to emphasize that nearly all videos include implicatures. This results in multiple interpretations of the videos as the interpreters (viewers) must make their own conclusions. In other words, McEntee exploits the maxim of manner through ambiguity and obscurity (Grice [1975] 1989), which grants him plausible deniability (Engel and Wodak 2013; Sengul 2022b).

In my analysis I aimed to provide interpretations that acknowledge McEntee's conservative background and how it affects how he engages with his audience. It is likely that the viewer already knows that McEntee is a conservative Republican, as that is how he markets himself and the Date Right Stuff dating app. Of course, depending on their political leanings, different people draw different interpretations and opinions of these videos. Nonetheless, the textual analysis of the data reveals both overt and covert opinions on issues in the United States' political field that seek to reinforce the idea of a unified conservative ideology. In summary, explicit and implicit meaning relations show how McEntee presents people and groups in the light of conservative ideology, which functions to reinforce the conservative stance on these topics.

The discursive and social dimensions were discussed together as it is difficult to disentangle them from each other. Overall, the videos employ several tactics of persuasion which overlap to create a complex set of possible persuasion devices. The different tactics support each other which strengthens the persuasive power while reinforcing the conservative ideologies behind them. The main aspects I analyzed were 'us' and 'them' rhetoric through the manifestation of right-wing ideologies, humor, sarcasm and wordplay, and the use of implication and recontextualization. These strategies simplify complex issues making them easier to grasp and creates an environment in which the viewers must be active participants to follow what is said. The distribution of videos happens through a social media platform where numbers

measure success and further increase the number of views, comments and followers. The receiving and interpreting of the videos is dependent on the recipients understanding of the message that is often emotionally loaded, said indirectly or meant to be received differently based on ideological and political leanings.

In general, Republicans or conservatives are the target audience for more positive and agreeable reactions whereas Democrats or liberals are the audience that is rage-baited and expected to respond negatively. These findings are in line with Sengul's (2025) recent assessment of the content starring John McEntee on the Date Right Stuff website, on TikTok and on YouTube. In addition, the recipient must be keenly aware of the current societal and political issues in the US as McEntee discusses these topics on the assumption that there is a common understanding and knowledge on the topics. However, not having full understanding on controversial topics can also make the recipients more susceptible to the message, which the speaker can then take advantage of.

The videos can also be categorized as marketing, albeit that McEntee hardly focuses on dating or the dating app itself. The only mention of the app comes in the form of merchandise McEntee wears in some of the videos. This raises an important question about the purpose of the videos. On one hand, they create visibility for the app. On the other hand, his approach might actually be counterproductive, especially when it is negative and polarizing, as it presents the speaker in a negative light, even if the goal is to attract people to agree or download the app and buy merchandise. This is difficult to evaluate without studying how people experience the content, but it is important to acknowledge when analyzing and discussing this type of data. Simply put, presenting others in a negative light does not automatically cast the speaker in a positive light and it might actually be off-putting to the viewers.

McEntee can personally gain visibility, followers and fans, as well as profit from the videos. This is another aspect to consider as he is active in the United States political field. He does not disclose if he can monetize the videos or if he has sponsors. However, the apps' following would suggest at least some form of sponsorship. Media literacy is important in that aspect as well as it is good to acknowledge that social media is also a business and the motivation for posting videos is not always only out of the joy of creating content. In addition, the mass following of McEntee allows him to build an image for himself as a conservative political figure with a high number of online followers.

6.2 Limitations

All research that is done faces constraints in one way or another, which effects how the result of the research can be interpreted. For this thesis, there were many possible angles from which to approach the topic, and not all could fit in the scope of this thesis. Firstly, video data would ideally be analyzed multimodally, taking into account the visual aspects of the content. These aspects were not evaluated in the analysis as the visuals and aesthetics of the videos were quite similar in each video. In other words, using a multimodal method would have resulted in repetitive analysis. Secondly, the marketing aspects of dating apps could also be addressed. Analyzing marketing and language used in marketing is, however, a different area of research and would have broadened the scope of this thesis too much. These aspects were addressed only to a limited degree as it was necessary to prioritize the linguistic analysis and the focus on ideology. Nonetheless, I recognize its significance and potential as a complementary research angle and hope to explore it further in the future, in addition to multimodal analysis.

TikTok as an application was discussed only briefly. The nature of the app and the inner workings of it do affect how videos succeed on the platform. Purely linguistic analyses do not account for all the reasons why the videos have such a high engagement rate, but language is nonetheless an important contributing factor. In addition, the politics behind large social media corporations is a major contributing factor in what happens within apps. Tension in ownership do reflect on the content and this was exemplified by the TikTok ban in the United States. The ban was ultimately a political decision for current United States president Donald Trump, which, in itself, makes TikTok a part of the political tension within the US and outside of it. This is one angle that was examined in passing in this thesis as it risks sidetracking the analysis from the linguistic aspects of the videos to the relationship between the United States and China, where TikTok was originally created, and Donald Trump's policies and opinions. Nevertheless, much more could be said about the qualities of TikTok, and the political discussions around it, which is an angle that could be incorporated into future research.

Beyond the limitations of scope, the relatively small sample size and the specific nature of the data make broad generalizations difficult. Therefore, similar to Sengul (2025), this thesis should be viewed as a case study of a particular topic rather than a study applicable to all social media discourse. Nevertheless, these videos do reflect certain evolving social media trends and contribute to the discussion of ongoing intensity of online discussions. This

analysis serves as an example of how ideological discourse manifests on social media and how power and persuasion can be exercised over viewers. In addition, some aspects in the videos lean into other research fields which would have expanded the topic too far outside of linguistics. Applying sociology, psychology or more multimodality to this research topic would be an interesting addition to support the linguistic aspects I have presented in this thesis. In addition, user experiences would further elaborate the effects of social media phenomena that have been discussed mostly qualitatively in this thesis.

7 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine how conservative ideologies are reinforced in social media discourse, specifically on TikTok, and how this content aims to persuade the audience. To be more specific, this thesis sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How are conservative ideologies reinforced in the Date Right Stuff application's social media marketing videos?
2. How do the Date Right Stuff application's videos persuade or manipulate the viewer?

To account for the first research question, the ideologies were firstly detected through text level analysis and the focus was on polarizing rhetoric that revealed ideological leanings in the Date Right stuff social media marketing videos. McEntee associates himself and the company with conservative and Republican values, while he also disassociates himself and the company from liberal and Democrat values, as also identified by Sengul (2025) in a recent study. The text level analysis revealed that the use of synonymy, hyponymy and antonymy aligns with conservative values and ideologies. McEntee presents groups he finds threatening or not aligned with conservatism with as synonymous with negative attributes. Similarly, the use of hypernyms and hyponyms reinforces conservative attitudes in relation to binary understanding or gender, traditional roles of parents and differences between liberal and conservative values about money and spending. Antonymy analysis showed opposing attitudes towards different areas of political and social issues in the United States. The antonyms indicate his critical stance towards the American education system, the government, criminality and changing attitudes towards religion. All of these categories function to create a feeling of division that aligns with the pre-existing polarized nature of the American political field. McEntee is, of course, only one Republican exercising his beliefs in a certain way that are more reflective of a more right-wing or rigidly conservative stance. It is, however, worth noting that this analysis does not illustrate a perfect representation of conservative or Republican population in the United States. It is rather an illustrative example of how language use can reinforce conservative and right-wing ideologies through social media.

To account for the second research question, the discourse and social dimensions were analyzed together as the two are difficult to disentangle in the data. The analysis revealed

several tactics of persuasion that also align with conservative ideology. It indicated that persuasion happens through ideologically divisive and populist language, indirect messaging and simplification of complicated social issues. Most of the videos are delivered in a humorous or sarcastic manner which amplifies the provocative and yet persuasive messaging. The manifestation of right-wing ideologies revealed that the most prevalent ideology was anti-government sentiments followed by anti-immigration, anti-Liberal/Democrat and anti-trans attitudes. These topics, especially criticism towards the government and taxation policies, echoes the frames of economic conservatism. Some of these ideological leanings were more explicit, marked by what conservatives are known to refer to as ‘owning the Libs’ (Sengul 2025; Walberg 2023), whereas others were implicit in nature.

In conclusion, the language and discourse analyzed in the videos from Date Right Stuff app’s TikTok reinforces conservative ideologies at the text level with divisive language and aims to persuade at the discursive and social levels by appealing to the audiences while also provoking them. The messages often rely on implicatures, which leaves the videos open for interpretation. Subjectivity must be accounted for in this type of research and therefore I aimed to be as objective as possible in my critical analysis of the data, as based on the theoretical frameworks, analytical toolkits and the overall definitions of conservatism when presenting the results of the analysis. Different interpretations can, of course, be made from the data and the interpretations I made in this thesis indicate the presence and reinforcement of pre-existing conservative values and ideologies. With a multidisciplinary approach, these interpretations could be further elaborated.

Lastly, this aim of this thesis has been to illustrate the meaning of social media language and how ideology is embedded into messaging that can seem humorous and even harmless. The rise of right-wing ideologies, shifting political attitudes and polarized social media discourses are important fields to research as more and more information is gathered from social media in addition to traditional news media. The niche of a conservative dating app and its related social media content is rather conveniently linked to the rising partisan gap between young men and women in the United States, where young men are becoming more conservative and young women more liberal (Deckman 2024). Young people often are the target group for dating apps and unconventional social media content which is why it is important to understand how discourses like the ones presented in this thesis are affected by these social changes and vice versa. Especially young userbases in social media platforms such as TikTok

are more impressionable to content that aims to persuade or manipulate which is why researching these topics and educating on them is important. Media literacy and criticality towards social media content in everyday life is a skill that needs to be taught, thus, more research on social media phenomena is warranted.

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Appendix 1. Primary data transcriptions with references

All videos featured in the primary data are posted by **John McEntee** in the account **@daterightstuff** on TikTok. Account available at: <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff>

Video 1:

“This is a legitimate question, should trans women be allowed on a lesbian dating app?” February 1, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7330428459501636882>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 2:

“Imagine being a Liberal, you vote for student loan forgiveness, and you end up with 7% interest rates and World War 3.” February 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7330473434356403474>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 3:

“Chicago officials passed a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the Middle East, that’s great, but maybe they can have a ceasefire in Chicago first?” February 1, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7330750267803159815>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 4:

Black man: “I like being black.” Liberals: “That’s great!” White man: “I like being white.” Liberals: “You’re racist.” February 2, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7330756899928870152>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 5:

“If the government can just keep printing money, why do I have to keep paying taxes?” February 3, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7331468351010622738>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 6:

“Homeschooling is not an experiment people have been homeschooled for thousands of years, government run schooling is the experiment and that experiment has gone to shit.” February 4, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7331865312033279250>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 7:

“The mayor of New York city is giving illegal aliens prepaid credit cards, great, since I’m actually an American citizen does that mean I’m getting a platinum card?” February 6, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7332252972983897362>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 8:

Attn: Elon Musk: “This is more of a philosophical question, when you own a company, but a random judge can take away your salary and force you to put a diversity hire on your board, is it really your company?” February 6, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7332254402998242567>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 9:

“Parenting goals: Then vs Now:”
“2014: Keep your daughter off the pole and your son out of jail”
“2024: Get them to their 18th Birthday with their genitals still attached.”
February 6, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7332257982492790034>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 10:

“So, 40% of high schools in Baltimore don’t have a single student that could pass a basic math proficiency test, and yet they’ll all be voting when they turn 18. Yay democracy.” February 7, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7332891634557881608>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 11:

“Yeah, I’m in cult, we brainwash people to think for themselves.” February 7, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7332909962512944391>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 12:

“Let’s stop worrying how Elon Musk spends his money and start worrying how the government spends ours.” February 8, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7333295927698017582>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 13:

Video caption: “What’s the difference between humans and animals?”
McEntee: “Animals would never let the dumbest ones lead the pack.” February 8, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7333330952263044398>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 14:

“You’re probably not finding love, because you’re the problem and God is protecting other people from you.” February 9, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7333637539552742702>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 15:

“NFL stadiums have walls and fans that haven’t paid for a ticket aren’t allowed in, period. Doesn’t matter if you’ve travelled thousands of miles or if you have a little kid with you or if you cry outside the gate, they still won’t let you in. Fascinating concept.” February 9, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7333641184772099374>

Video 16:

“I’m really glad I learned about parallelograms instead of how to do taxes, it’s really coming handy this parallelogram season.” February 9, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7333651474360093995>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 17:

“Genders are like the Twin Towers, there used to be two of them but now it’s kind of a sensitive subject.” February 10, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7333797070450461998>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 18:

“The difference between the government and robbers is that robbers don’t pretend they’re helping you.” February 11, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7334134050153811246>, accessed April 10, 2024

Video 19:

Video caption: “POV: I’m a college admissions officer in 2024.”
McEntee: “Okay your GPA is fantastic, your SAT scores are off the charts and the charity started unbelievable, there’s just one problem, you’re a straight white male.” February 12, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7334828724447153451>, accessed, April 10, 2024

Video 20:

“If we start calling California Taiwan and Arizona Ukraine and Texas Israel then maybe our government would start protecting those borders.” February 14, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7335240417522322730>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 21:

“You’re probably not finding love this Valentine’s Day because you’re the problem (thank you) and God is protecting other people from you.” February 14,

2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7335567521971473706>,
accessed April 12, 2024

Video 22:

“This Valentine’s Day find someone that loves you the way North Koreans are forced to love Kim Jong Un.” February 14, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7335569296510225706>

Video 23:

“So, taking kids to church is indoctrinating them with religion but taking them to drag Queen Story Hour is educational?” February 16, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7335953748449266990>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 24:

“The same people that forced you to get vaccinated to keep your job then let in 10 million people who were unvaccinated and unemployed.” February 16, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7336203386523766062>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 25:

“Elite billionaires vote to raise taxes and then they move to red states to avoid paying them. If you vote for a Democrat, maybe you should be forced to live in a Democrat state.” February 17, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7336368948230868270>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 26:

“If people don’t cheat, why can’t we have mail in drug tests?” February 17, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7336372038678138158>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 27:

“Give a man a fish you feed him for a day but deport a man and you never have to feed him again.” February 18, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7337052076863737130>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 28:

“Good rule of thumb if they don’t immediately tell you who the shooter is, he’s not a white male.” February 19, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7337347609281006890>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 29:

“So, the White House is unable to track billions of dollars sent to Ukraine and the US Treasury is unable to track trillions of dollars in pandemic spending, yet the IRS wants to know where your five dollars and thirty-eight cents is or you’re

going to jail.” February 29, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7338510774794734894>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 30:

“When the media doesn’t release the mugshot, we know exactly what the suspect looks like.” February 23, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7338580364891327787>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 31:

Liberals: “But if you homeschool your kids they won’t fit into society”
“Yeah, that’s the point.” February 23, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7338610227673189678>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 32:

“Whenever I’m feeling down, I just remind myself that a trillion dollars’ worth of propaganda didn’t work on me.” February 24, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7339006028454858027>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 33:

“So, it used to be that we had empires run by emperors and then we had kingdoms run by kings and now we have countries run by...” February 24, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7339268373718601002>

Video 34:

“When you’re doing your taxes this year, don’t forget to list all of your dependants, your son, your daughter, Ukraine, Israel.” February 24, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7339272448564546859>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 35:

“In 1979 the department of education was created, since then we went from first to 25th in education, so great job everybody.” February 25, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7339311344988032298>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 36:

McEntee: “I know we just moved in, but I think our neighbors are white supremacists”

Woman: “Why?”

McEntee: “I mean all the early warning signs are there, fully employed, stable home with kids, no criminal record they attend church regularly, I even heard the one guy say he distrusts the government, scary.” February 27, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7340050218223701294>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 37:

“If you can’t find the right guy it might be because you haven’t made yourself the kind of girl the right guy wants.” February 28, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7340455941822860587>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 38:

Pessimist: “This class is half empty.”

Optimist: “No, this class is half full.”

Liberal: “The water is racist.” February 28, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7340457511822118186>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 39:

“Do you really think handing over your gun ends gun violence? That’s like chopping of your own dick to stop rape.” [https://www.tiktok.com/](https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7340462150210702635)

[@daterightstuff/video/7340462150210702635](https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7340462150210702635), accessed April 12, 2024

Video 40:

“I agree everything should be electric, let’s start with the border wall.” February 28, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7340758613633486126>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 41:

“Ladies I know why you’re doing this, but can you please stop voting Democrat and just find alternative ways to disappoint your father.” February 28, 2024,

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7340775788876172587>, accessed April 12, 2024

Video 42:

Dating in 2024:

“So have you always been a Christian?”

“No, I used to be a Christina.” March 2, 2024. [https://www.tiktok.com/](https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7341525504182275371)

[@daterightstuff/video/7341525504182275371](https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7341525504182275371), accessed June 5, 2024

Video 43:

“Instead of sending Pakistan millions of dollars for gender programs, can we send them millions of Liberals with gender studies degrees?” March 2, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7341526389247479083>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 43:

“If you can’t afford gas, just buy an 80 000-dollar electric car ya dummy.” March 3, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7341794132366560555>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 44:

Ladies if your date shows up wearing a mask in 2024, I think you both need to start seeing other men” March 3, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7341899356695481642>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 45:

“So, if you spank your kid you might go to jail, but if you don’t spank your kid they might end up a Liberal. Parenting can be kinda tricky these days” March 3, <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7341900382534143275>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 46:

“Vegans will combine 10 carcinogens with 50 industrial chemicals to make “food” instead of just having steak” March 5, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7342712803494513962>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 47:

“So, the gender pay gap is real, but gender isn’t real, got it.” March 5, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7342958103165701422>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 48:

10-year-old: “Mom i don’t wanna cut off my penis!”
Liberal mom: “I’m the only mom in my group without a trans kid stop being so selfish.” March 7, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7343392712168869166>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 49:

“To all the feminists out there, being aggressive and rude and generally unpleasant doesn’t make you a “strong woman. It just makes you annoying as fuck.” March 7, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7343402749364653354>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 50:

“This is a serious question, when did our government become a retirement home for old geriatric warmongers?” Marc 9, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7344154680928308522>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 51:

“Good news about all the illegal immigrants coming to the US, crime rates are dropping fast in South America.” March 9, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7344462463674420523>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 52:

“Instead of using AI to pretend everyone in history was black, can we use it to read those 10 000-page bills so politicians can’t hide stuff from us anymore.” March 9, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7344481297538108715>, accessed June 5

Video 53:

“So, if you lie to the government, it’s called a crime, but if the government lies to you it’s called politics.” March 11, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7344884864371526955>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 54:

“Schools will be like “drugs are bad” and then subscribe a six-year-old Adderall because they don’t wanna sit in the same spot for eight hours.” March 12, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7345564505612717358>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 55:

“So, insurance companies can screw us all over but if we screw them, it’s fraud?” March 12, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7345568873296547114>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 56:

“Why is it at gender reveal parties people only choose one of two colors.” March 13, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7345912728436870442>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 57:

US citizens: “I can't afford a home, I don't feel safe, groceries are way too expensive, my entire neighborhood is filled with homeless people.”
US government: “Best I can do is ban TikTok.” March 14, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7346334568246414635>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 58:

“I have an idea let’s keep TikTok and ban congress.” March 14, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7346335763266686254>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 59:

“I am probably the wrong messenger for this but way too many people are counting calories instead of counting chemicals.” March 16, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7347028550031133998>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 60:

”Congratulations everyone on the four-year anniversary of “two weeks to flatten the curve”.” March 17, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff>

</video/7347172029428305198>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 61:

“I just wanna thank my parents for not letting me pick my gender while I was trying to eat crayons and glue my hands together.” March 18, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7347762021620043054>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 62:

“So, I need a real ID to fly but the illegals they’re sending all over the country need no ID at all? Interesting.” March 18, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com>

</@daterightstuff/video/7347780870742215978>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 63:

“Democrats claim that the children of an illegal alien shouldn’t have to pay for the crimes of the parent. Okay maybe. But then they’ll say we’re responsible for 17th century slave owners?” March 19, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/>

<@daterightstuff/video/7348114391549709610>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 64:

”The same people that say masculinity is toxic want men to risk their lives in foreign wars that have nothing to do with us.” March 20, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7348202081100221742>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 65:

”If “gun free” zones work, why don’t we set up “rape free” zones?” March 20,

2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7348203213490982190>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 66:

Liberal logic: “Our government is racist corrupt and bought out by corporations but if we give them more money they’ll fix the weather.” March 20, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7348463883679436075>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 67:

“So, a 20 can’t have alcohol but a five-year-old can pick their gender.” March 23, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7349334362829229355>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 68:

“So, a man who doesn’t wanna take care of his kid is a deadbeat dad but a woman who doesn’t want to, is pro-choice? Got it.” March 23, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7349340302034930986>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 69:

Liberal logic: “You cannot bring God into school, religion interferes with science. Oh, and also men can get pregnant.” March 24, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7350025913163091242>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 70:

“It’s funny how congress who doesn’t know how to balance a budget knows how to make themselves millionaires.” March 24, 2024.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7350027754928229674>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 71:

“So, if you smoke pot, you can be disqualified from the Olympics but if you are a biological man and take estrogen for a year you can compete in women’s weightlifting?” March 25, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7350398652596325678>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 72:

”So, a real burger patty is that’s one ingredient is bad but a fake burger patty with 17 ingredients is good?” March 25, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7350401176489299242>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 73:

”So, everyone’s getting mad that I’m anti-gun control but if gun control worked wouldn’t Chicago be one of the safest cities in America? Instead, it’s a freaking war zone.” March 25, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7350406912770428203>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 74:

Covid stupidity. “Remember when we weren’t allowed to eat inside unless we made a new inside and put it outside.” March 27, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7351109346526530862>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 75:

“So, squatters can set up camp in your home for months and there’s nothing you can do about it but if you miss one mortgage payment the bank takes your house away? Weird.” March 27, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7351111058423139626>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 76:

“I still can’t believe that changing a picture on a box of pancake mix didn’t result in world peace.” March 28, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7351509065836530986>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 77:

“If you outlaw abortions, abortions will just happen illegally. But if your outlaw guns then we’ll all be safe.” March 28, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7351509986360479018>, accessed

Video 78:

“I don’t know if anybody saw the news, but scientists are warning that within six months humanity will run out of things to call racist.” March 29, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7351853036668603690>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 79:

13-year-old: “Mom I wanna get my lip pierced”
Liberal mom: “Honey you are not mature enough to make that decision. Now come on it’s time for your hormone therapy.” March 29, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7351854873392074026>, accessed June 5, 2024

Video 80:

“Joe Biden the devout Catholic has found a new meaning for Easter this season, goodbye resurrection of Christ and hello transgender day of awareness.” March 29, 2024. <https://www.tiktok.com/@daterightstuff/video/7352189754789661995>, accessed June 5, 2024

Appendix 2. Finnish Summary

Johdanto

Ihmisillä on luontainen tarve pysyä yhteydessä toisiin ihmisiin ((Lieberman in Cook 2013). Ystäviin, perheeseen ja muihin läheisiin pidetään yhteyttä monin keinoin ja yhteydenpito ja uusien yhteyksien luominen on osasyä myös viestintäteknologioiden nopeaan kehitykseen. Eri medioiden ja alustojen välillä tapahtuva kommunikaatio ja tutustuminen on yleistynyt ja yksi esimerkki tästä on netti- ja sovellusdeittailun suosio. Deittisovellukset ovat vaihtoehtoinen tapa tavata uusia ihmisiä ja luoda yhteyksiä. Nykypäivänä deittisovelluksia helposti saatavilla eri tarkoituksiin ja eri ihmisryhmille, jolloin käyttäjät voivat valita mieleisensä alustan esimerkiksi mielipiteiden, arvojen sekä oman seksuaalisen suuntautumisen pohjalta. Spesifin markkinaraon löytäminen sovellusmarkkinoilla voi olla tuottelias tapa haalia käyttäjiä. Käyttäjien lisäksi itse sovellukset ja niiden luojat ylläpitävät tiettyjä mielipiteitä ja arvoja, mikä näkyy muun muassa sovelluksien markkinoinnissa tai sosiaalisen median läsnäolossa. Yksi esimerkki spesifin markkinaraon täyttäneestä sovelluksesta on yhdysvaltalainen deittisovellus Date Right Stuff, joka on suunnattu yhdysvaltalaisille konservatiiveille. Sovelluksella on vahva sija sosiaalisessa mediassa, etenkin TikTok-sovelluksessa, jossa @daterightstuff-käyttäjälle julkaistaan videoita eri Yhdysvaltojen ajankohtaisista sosiaalisista ja poliittisista teemoista. Videoilla esiintyy sovelluksen luoja John McEntee ja hänen viestinsä perustuvat pitkälti vahvojen mielipiteiden sekä ideologioiden jakamiseen sekä niiden vahvistamiseen. Tässä tutkielmassa keskitytään siihen, kuinka konservatiivi ideologioita levitetään ja vahvistetaan Date Right Stuff -sovelluksen TikTok videoilla ja kuinka tämä sisältö samalla pyrkii vakuuttamaan ja vetoamaan katsojiin.

Sosiaalisen median diskurssit ovat yhä kärjistyneempiä, minkä takia sosiaalisen median kielenkäyttöä on tärkeää tutkia. Motivaationa tälle tutkielmalle on polarisoituneet sosiaaliset keskustelut ja itse @daterightstuff-tilin saama suuri huomio sosiaalisessa mediassa. Käyttäjällä on miljoonia seuraajia sekä videoilla parhaimmillaan kymmeniä miljoonia katselukertoja. Tämä potentiaali saavuttaa miljoonia ihmisiä antaa valtaa ihmisille videoiden takana ja tätä valtaa voidaan käyttää monin tavoin. Kuten mainittu, tässä tutkielmassa painopiste on ideologioiden levittämisessä sekä suostuttelutaktiikoihin. Tutkielmassa vastataan seuraaviin tutkimuskysymyksiin:

1. Millä tavoin konservatiivisia ideologioita vahvistetaan Date Right Stuff -sovelluksen sosiaaliseen median sisällössä?

2. Kuinka tämä sisältö pyrkii suostuttelemaan tai vakuuttamaan katsojia?

Näihin kysymyksiin vastataan kriittisen diskurssitutkimuksen (Critical Discourse Analysis tai CDA) keinoin. Tutkimuksen teoria pohjaa Norman Faircloughin kolmen ulottuvuuden malliin (three-dimensional model), joka jakaa analyysin kolmeen eri tasoon. Teorian avulla tutkimuskysymyksiin vastataan kriittisesti sekä objektiivisesti. Lisäksi suostutteluanalyysin apuna käytetään van Dijkilta lainattuja ja muokattuja työkaluja, jotka soveltuvat suostuttelun ja vakuuttelun tarkasteluun.

Taustaa

Oleellimmat taustatekijät tätä tutkielmaa varten liittyvät markkinointiin, TikTokin markkinointikuplaan, deittisovelluksiin sekä tärkeimpänä videoissa esiintyvän John McEnteen taustoihin sekä lyhyesti Yhdysvaltojen poliittiseen systeemiin.

Tämän tutkielman videodata voidaan kategorisoida markkinoinniksi. Markkinointi ei ole suoraan etusijalla analyysissä, mutta on tärkeää pitää mielessä videoiden ja sitä kautta video transkriptioiden genre. Perinteinen markkinointi pohjautuu tuotteen mainostukseen ja myyntiin siten, että tuote tuottaa arvoa asiakkaalle ja asiakkaalta takaisin yritykselle mikä (Kotler et al., 2017;7). Tämä on hyvin optimisten ja yksipuolinen ajatusmalli, sillä kommunikaatio yrityksen asiakkaan välillä ei usein ole suoraviivaista ja kapitalistisissa yhteiskunnissa myynti ja tuotto korostuu vahvemmin. Date Right Stuff -sovelluksen TikTok sisältö ei kuitenkaan seuraa täysin perinteiseksi koetun markkinoinnin raameja. TikTok on lyhytvideo sovellus, jonne käyttäjät voivat julkaista omanlaisiaan videoita. TikTokin etusivu, jolla videoita selataan, perustuu vahvasti algoritmin toimintaa, mikä tarjoaa katsojalle kohdennettua sisältöä. Monet TikTokin sisäiset ominaisuudet mahdollistavat videoiden leviämistä sekä niistä saatavaa rahallista hyötyä.

TikTok itsessään on omanlaisensa markkinointiympäristön, jossa yritykset voivat olla vahvemmin yhteydessä asiakaskuntaan ja katsojiin sekä luoda hyvin Tik Tokille tyypillistä sisältöä. Monet yritykset tarttuvatkin tähän TikTokin ominaiseen tapaan tuottaa lyhyttä ja ytimekästä sisältöä, joka saattaa levitä hyvinkin laajalle ja generoida miljoonia katselukertoja, tykkäyksiä sekä kommentteja. Itse videoista voi saada rahaa katselukertoja kohden, mutta

monet käyttäjät ja brändit tekevät myös sponsoroituja yhteistöitä, joista käyttäjä voi saada tuloja. Tämä voi olla brändille hyvin tuottoisaa ja ne tavat, joilla sisältö saavuttaa näitä lukuja saattaa poiketa perinteisen markkinoinnin tavoista, mikä on keskeinen näkökulma tässä tutkielmassa.

Yksi tapa saada katsojien huomio on julkaista sisältöä, joka kohauttaa. Englanninkielinen termi ”rage-bait” viittaa sisältöön, jonka tarkoitus on saavuttaa katsojan huomio tavalla, joka herättää ärtymystä tai muita negatiivisia tunteita. Tällainen sisältö on yleistynyt TikTokissa, jossa katsojan huomio täytyy pystyä herättämään sekunneissa. Tärkeä elementti tämän tutkielman datassa on sen provokatiivinen luonne sekä pyrkimys herättää vahvoja, usein negatiivisiakin tunteita, minkä takia Date Right Stuffin videot voisi luokitella rage-bait-sisällöksi. Kuten mainittu itse markkinointi ei ole keskiössä tämän tutkielman analyysissä, vaan analyysi keskittyy ideologioihin, joita videoissa ilmenee. On kuitenkin tärkeää pitää mielessä, että data on kerätty yritystililtä, jolla on huomattava määrä seuraajia, mikä viittaa myös pyrkimykseen myydä ja tehdä tuottoa. McEntee on poliittinen henkilö, jolla on miljoonia seuraajia yritystilillään, mikä sallii hänen käsiinsä myös tietynlaista valtaa, minkä takia niiden tutkiminen on keskiössä.

Teoria

Tämä tutkielma kehys pohjautuu kriittiseen diskurssianalyysiin, englanniksi Critical Discourse Analysis eli CDA. Se voidaan määritellä monin eri tavoin, mikä tekee siitä usein monitulkintaisen viitekehyksen tutkimuksille. Yksi yhteinen tekijä monissa määritelmässä on kuitenkin vallan ja voiman käyttö lingvistisestä näkökulmasta. Van Dikjin mukaan, CDA on analyttistä tutkimusta, joka pääosin tutkii, miten sosiaalinen vallankäyttö tapahtuu, miten sitä levitetään ja yllytetään tai pyritään hillitä tekstissä sosiaalisessa ja poliittisessä kontekstissa. (2015, 466). Fairclough jakaa tämän ajatuksen vallan käytöstä ja painottaa vielä valtaa diskurssin *takana* eikä vain, miten valta näkyy kielessä (2015, 3). CDA:ta kuitenkin myös kritisoidaan siitä, että laajat ja epäyhtenäiset määritelmät jättävät varaa subjektiivisille analyyseille ja tulkinnoille. Terminologia ja metodologia saattavat myös olla hämmentäviä (Widdowson 1998; 162). Widdowson painottaa, että nämä aspektit saattavat vaarantaa tutkimuksen objektiivisuuden. (Ibid.). Tämä ei kuitenkaan ole este CDA:n käyttöön, kunhan tiedostaa omat mielipiteensä ja arvonsa tutkijana ja pyrkii pitämään tutkimuksen mahdollisimman objektiivisena pysymällä määriteltyjen termien sisällä ja seuraamalla valitun teorian viitekehyksiä.

Tässä tutkielmassa analyysi pohjautuu Norman Faircloughin kolmen ulottuvuuden malliin, joka on tunnustettu teoriapohja CDA:n saralla. Mallin pohjana on ajatus siitä, että kieli ja diskurssit ovat osa yhteiskuntaa eivätkä sen ulkopuolella (Fairclough, 1989; 22). Tämä tapahtuu kolmella tasolla eli tekstitasolla (text), diskurssitasolla (discursive practice) sekä sosiaalisella tasolla (social practice). Nimensä mukaan tekstitaso keskittyy kielen ominaisuuksiin ja tekstin kielellisiin elementteihin, kuten sananvalintoihin, kielioppiin tai sanojen merkityssuhteisiin. Tässä tutkielmassa merkityssuhteet ovat keskiössä ja tekstitasoa tutkitaan synonyymien, hyponyymien ja antonyymien näkökulmasta. Diskurssitaso keskittyy siihen, millainen vuorovaikutus tekstillä ja vastaanottajilla on, miten tekstiä tuotetaan ja levitetään. Tähän liittyy vahvasti se, miten vastaanottaja tekstin tulkitsee. Viimeinen taso, eli sosiaalinen taso keskittyy niihin sosiaalisiin konteksteihin, joissa diskurssit tapahtuvat. Nämä ympäristöt vaikuttavat diskurssien sisältöön, mutta vastavuoroisesti myös diskurssit vaikuttavat ympäröivään yhteiskuntaan. Fairclough painottaa, että kieli ei ole vain osa yhteiskuntaa vaan kielelliset ilmiöt ovat erityislaatuisia sosiaalisia ilmiöitä. Tähän liittyy myös vahvasti ideologiat ja niiden vaikutus kieleen, mikä tässäkin tutkielmassa on keskiössä.

Kuten mainittu, tässä tutkielmassa tekstitasoa analysoidaan sanojen merkityssuhteiden pohjalta. Diskurssitasoa ja sosiaalista tasoa taas tutkaillaan samanaikaisesti vetoamiskeinojen analyysin avulla. Tätä varten tutkielmassa sovelletaan van Dijkin triangulaatio-teoriakehyksen työkaluja, joilla vetoamiskeinoja voidaan tarkastella. Van Dijkin teorian inspiroimana datasta analysoitiin seuraavia asioita:

1. Oikeisto ideologioiden esiintyminen (osana ”me vastaan ne” retoriikkaa)
2. Huumori, sarkasmi ja sanaleikki
3. Implikaatiot
4. Uudelleen kontekstualisointi

Nämä kategoriat yhdistelevät ja tiivistävät strategioita, joista van Dijk puhuu artikkelissaan diskursseista ja manipulaatioista (2006, 359–383).

Aineisto ja menetelmiä

Tutkielman data koostuu 80 lyhyestä videosta Date Right Stuff -sovelluksen TikTok-käyttäjältä. Videot alle 30 sekuntia pitkiä, joten ne koostuvat keskimäärin muutamasta virkkeestä. Jokainen video on kuvattu samalla formaatilla. Yksi sovelluksen perustajista, John McEntee, puhuu jokaisessa videossa kameralle rennossa ympäristössä, yleensä ravintoloissa

tai ulkona. Data on kerätty 2.2.2024-30.3.2024 väliltä. Erityisiä kriteereitä ajankohdalle ei ole, mutta halusin sisällyttää mukaan ne videot, joihin törmäsin helmikuussa ja inspiroiduin perehtymään niihin. Kriteerit videoille olivat kuitenkin selkeät:

1. Videoiden täytyy olla Date Right Stuffin omalta käyttäjältä ja vain heidän julkaisemiaan.
2. Kommentteja ja muita katsojien tuottamaa sisältöä ei sisällytetä dataan, jotta yksityishenkilöiden anonymiteetti säilyy.
3. Videoissa täytyy olla ääntä. Joissakin videoissa audio on poistettu, eikä näitä otettu mukaan dataan, jotta data pysyy yhdenmukaisena.
4. Kaikki aiheet ovat sallittuja, kunhan niitä ei voi yhdistää yksityishenkilöihin tai tiettyihin haavoittuvaisiin ihmisryhmiin.

Eettiset seikat tutkielmassa liittyvät lähinnä käyttäjien yksityisyyteen, mikä on taattu edellä mainittujen kriteereiden kautta. Myös videoissa esiintyvä John McEntee on julkisuuden henkilö ja julkaisee videoita julkiselle yritystilille, jolla on miljoonia seuraajia. Tämän tutkielman ei ole tarkoitus aiheuttaa vahinkoa McEnteelle vaan analysoida objektiivisesti kieltä ja diskursseja.

Dataan perehdyttiin lähiluvun ja lähikuuntelun tekniikoiden pohjalta. Datasta tarkasteltiin niitä kielellisiä elementtejä, jotka vahvistavat konservatiivi ideologioita sekä pyrkivät vakuuttamaan katsojia. Tärkeässä osassa oli myös merkityssuhteiden löytäminen varsinkin, kun McEntee käyttää vihjailevaa kieltä ja implikaatioita läpi koko datan.

Ideologiat ovat keskiössä tässä tutkielmassa ja ne ovat lingvistiikan alalla määritelty hyvin laajasti ja eri tavoin. Gramscin ja Althusserin mukaan ideologiat ovat pohjana sosiaalisille representaatioille, jotka ryhmän jäsenet jakavat (11, 1998). Van Dijk muistuttaa myös, että ideologiat ovat usein myös itsekeskeisiä, sillä ne hyödyttävät itseä ja ryhmän intressejä (ibid.). Faircloughn mukaan ideologinen valta on myös osa vakuuttamista, sillä omien ideologioiden heijastaminen muihin maalaisjärkeen vedoten on iso osa esimerkiksi poliittista vallankäyttöä (2015, 64).

Ideologioiden lisäksi implikaatit ovat vahvasti läsnä datassa ja sen analyysissä. Gricen yhteistyöperiaatteen mukaan, keskustelut kulkevat usein tiettyä polkua ja keskustelijoiden tulisi seurata tiettyjä raameja, jotta keskustelu on sopivan informatiivista. Tästä voidaan myös poiketa, mikä johtaa johdattelevaan tai vihjailevaan kieleen. Implikaatit kielessä jättävät

siten myös enemmän tulkinnanvaraa sanotuille asioille ja tätä voidaan käyttää myös tietoisena kielellisenä välineenä.

Analyysi ja tulokset

Analyysissä perehdyttiin aluksi tekstitasoon synonyymi, hyponyymi ja antonyymi analyysin avulla. Näitä merkityssuhteita tarkasteltiin omissa kappaleissan esimerkkien avulla.

Esimerkeistä poimittiin sanapareja, jotka illustroivat tapaa, jolla McEntee pyrki luomaan samankaltaisuuksia ja eroavuuksia sanottujen asioiden välille. Nämä merkityssuhteet olivat joko suoraan tai epäsuorasti ilmaistuja, mikä teki tulkinnasta haastavaa, sillä implikaatioiden analyysiä johdattelee myös tutkijan omat mielipiteet. Merkityssuhteista oli kuitenkin usein huomattavissa korrelaatiota konservatiivi ideologioihin, jotka esimerkeissä näkyivät usein vastakkainasetteluina.

Diskurssitason ja sosiaalisen tason analyysi tapahtui tutkimalla vetoamistaktiikoita. Näitä taktiikoita olivat muun muassa oikeisto ideologioiden ilmentäminen, huumori, sarkasmi ja sanaleikki, implikaatiot sekä uudelleen kontekstualisointi. McEntee ilmensi useita perinteisiä oikeistoideologioita, kuten hallituksen, maahanmuuton ja progressiivisen liberalismiin vatsaisia asenteita. Lisäksi McEntee osoitti kriittisyyttä LGBTQ+ yhteisöjä, feminismiä, ilmastonmuutosta ja rokotteita vastaan. Nämä asenteet asettivat eri ihmisryhmiä toisiaan vastaan, mikä vahvisti ”me vastaan ne” -ajattelua, mikä on osa vakuuttelevaa retoriikkaa.

Huumori, sarkasmi ja sanaleikki olivat yksi merkittävimmistä vetoamistaktiikoista. McEntee esittää konservatiivisia mielipiteitä huumorin ja sarkasmi kautta, mikä pyrkii vetoamaan katsojiin leikittelyn kautta. Tämä on myös osa videoien ”rage-bait” luonnetta, sillä McEntee tuo esiin hyvin sensitiivisiäkin aiheita huumorin ja liioittelun kautta, mikä saattaa herättää vahvoja tunteita niin kannattajissa kuin vastustajissa.

Implikaatioita ja sitä *mitä* ne ovat tarkasteltiin koko datan läpi, mutta vetoamistaktiikkana implikaatioita tarkasteltiin sen pohjalta, *miten* ne toimivat vakuuttelevana elementtinä.

Implikaatioiden avulla McEntee pystyi johdattamaan katsojaa tiettyihin tulkintoihin tai jättää katsojalle varaa täydentää itse sanomattomat kohdat. Tämä osaltaan myös luo oloa jaetusta tiedosta, mikä vahvistaa samankaltaisuuden ja lojaaliuden tunnetta. Epäsuorat ilmaukset myös toimivat tapana välttää vastuuta, sillä McEntee voi vedota siihen, että hän ei ole tarkoittanut sanomaansa kirjaimellisesti. Tämä toimii myös vetoavana, sillä katsojat päätyvät tiettyihin tulkintoihin, joista McEntee voi osittain irrottaa itsensä.

Uudelleen kontekstualisointi oli analyysissä vahva vetomaiskeino. McEntee muutti konseptien merkitystä haluamallaan tavalla, antoi poliittisille ja sosiaalisille ongelmille uusia kehyksiä, esitti epätosia korrelaatioita sekä hyödynsi historian tapahtumia nykypäivän tilanteisiin. Nämä uudet kontekstit usein yksinkertaistivat monimutkaisia ja vaikeasti ymmärrettäviä tapahtumia, mikä tekee videoista vetoavia. Populistinen tapa esittää myös kiistanalaisia mielipiteitä, tekevät niistä omalla tavallaan saavutettavampia yleisöille, joille ne eivät ole täysin tuttuja. Myös nämä vetoamisen keinot seurasivat pääosin konservatiivisia ideologioita ja esimerkeissä käytettiin monesti useampaa vetoamiskeinoa kerralla, mikä tekee videoista monitasoisia aatteiden levittäjiä.

Yhteenveto

Date Right Stuff deittisovelluksen TikTok sisältö osaltaan vahvistaa vahvoja konservatiivisia ideologioita, jotka liittyvät polttaviin aiheisiin, kuten perhearvoihin, seksuaalivähemmistöjen ja naisten oikeuksiin, uskontoon, maahanmuuttoon ja kulttuurien monimuotoisuuteen. Yhdysvaltojen kärjistynyt poliittinen tilanne reflektoituu videoiden sisältöihin, ja videot ovat osana myös vahvistamassa olemassa olevia asenteita. Sosiaalisen median sisällöt eivät usein kepeästä luonteestaan huolimatta ole yhdentekeviä palasia ideologioiden ja mielipiteiden levittämisessä. Date Right Stuff on vain yksi esimerkki sosiaalisen median polarisoivista sisällöistä, joista on tullut viime vuosina yhä suosituimpia. Myös ääriateiden vahvistuminen tekee tämänkaltaisesta tutkimuksesta ajankohtaista ja olennaista, varsinkin, kun jokapäiväisessä käytössä olevilla sosiaalisen median alustoilla pyritään vaikuttamaan käyttäjien mielipiteisiin ja asenteisiin. Kaikkeen tähän liittyy vahvasti myös katsojien vuorovaikutus sisältöihin sekä katsojien medialukutaito. Heikko medialukutaito altistaa katsojia disinformaatiolle sekä ideologisille vaikutteille. On tärkeää muistaa, että tämä tutkielma ei ole yleistettävissä kaikkiin sosiaalisen median diskursseihin, mutta toimii esimerkkinä siitä, miten ideologioita voidaan levittää ja miten katsojiin voidaan vedota. Sosiaalisen median lingvistinen tutkimus on siis tarpeellinen ja ajankohtainen tutkimuskohde, jota voisi laajentaa kattamaan myös katsojakokemukset sekä sosiaalisen median todelliset vaikutukset.