Conclusion

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CONCLUSION

The chapters in this volume cover broad themes. What unites them is their use of C-SPAN videos to make their arguments and points. But the topics covered, the issues raised, and the conclusions reached vary widely. Looking back, it might be useful to review the conclusions of each chapter.

There is no consistent use of scandal and crisis in Congress, we learn from Wildrick and Novak. Scandals and crises are used strategically to advance an argument or point of view. They “serve to modify the intensity and severity of a problem.” Their use ranges across issues from abortion to the War on Terror.

Discourse about law enforcement was the topic of the second chapter by Wilson and Scacco in this volume. This discourse was shaped by external forces including that on social media. The language of law enforcement has changed because of external events such as police violence. The image of law enforcement is no longer that of protection. In turn, the congressional communication that reflects public discourse can result in laws and legislation.

Understanding how former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan communicated uncertainty about the economy was the topic of Hearit and Buzzanell’s chapter. Because of the way that the markets could react to his testimony on Fed behavior, a great deal of attention was paid to Greenspan’s testimony. Greenspan effectively added uncertainty to his testimony. The authors link their analysis to organizational communication, something that has not been done before.

Nancy Brown, a historian contributing to this volume, examines the Human Rights Campaign Fund and the AIDS Action Council’s messages and strategies using videos from the C-SPAN Archives’ online Video Library. She finds strategies of fundraising and efforts to put gay issues at the center
of mainstream debate. At the end of her chapter, she also reflects on the value of the C-SPAN Video Library for historians. This is a valuable piece because of the importance of the C-SPAN Video Library for historical research.

In Wulbrecht’s study of the framing of mental health, she found that there was sympathy for the situation of veterans and adolescents involved in violence. They were deserving of treatment. Mentally ill adults were not seen as deserving of treatment as these other two groups. There was support for treatment as a tool to reduce violence. How members of Congress talk about mental illness and violence was the focus of this study.

Another textual study is that of Lam and Ganchoudhuri, who look at how health policy was portrayed during the 2016 election. Politics and parties matter, they find, influencing how health was talked about during the campaign. Sometimes health policy was talked about just to generate broader public support, especially by Donald Trump. Hillary Clinton talked about health care much more than Trump did and emphasized children and families. Trump, not surprisingly, was critical of the Affordable Care Act in many of his speeches.

As Trump became president, he continued his active tweeting that was the hallmark of the campaign. Harness and Scacco examine the differences between Trump’s tweets in the first 30 days and his speeches during that same period. This is one of the first important studies of a major element of the Trump presidency. The authors find that tweets provide a direct communication, inoculate Trump from opposition, and provide a “pseudo-interactivity” with the media. In contrast to Obama, Trump is much more reserved in using his family in speeches. Not surprisingly, there is a nationalistic element to his speeches in the way that he presents Americanism. This continues a theme from the campaign into the presidency.

Buozis, Rooney, and Creech present a thoughtful chapter on journalistic organizations featured in the C-SPAN Video Library to study the evolving journalism of today. Because the videos span 30 years, they provide a base from which to study these organizations. Each organization provides a different type of journalism, thus opening a new avenue for research. The C-SPAN Video Library contains many journalistic reflections, panels, and interviews, so this is an important study that urges scholars to exploit this genre of programs.
With each volume in this series, scholars have examined nonverbal communication in debates. In this volume, Eubanks, Stewart, and Dye look at audience reactions during the Clinton and Trump presidential debates. Trump had twice the number of speaking turns as did Clinton, reflecting his interruptions and outsider stature. However, there was almost four times the amount of laughter during Trump’s speeches as there was during Clinton’s. The authors argue that this further demonstrates the “enthusiasm gap” referenced by other observers.

Pavla Hlozkova explores how C-SPAN videos can be used in teaching a graduate business class. This chapter fits in a long tradition of studies that address teaching. What is different here is that the course is a business and graduate MBA course. The author reflects on what should go into selecting clips and provides insights for anyone who is thinking about incorporating C-SPAN videos in the classroom.

In these chapters it is not just the conclusions that matter, but the methods and approaches to the studies. These methods range from textual analysis, network analysis, content analysis, nonverbal communication analysis, to sentiment analysis. All these authors analyzed videos in some way to reach their conclusions. Since the chapters in this volume were written primarily by graduate students, the variety of methods employed is not surprising. They collectively show the promise of innovative research methods using videos.