Title: Evaluation in political discourse addressed to women: Appraisal analysis of

***Cosmopolitan's* online coverage of the 2014 US midterm elections**∗

María Aloy Mayo

Applied Linguistics Program

University of Valencia

Av. Blasco Ibáñez

Valencia

Spain

amama5@alumni.uv.es

Maite Taboada

Department of Linguistics

Simon Fraser University

8888 University Dr.

Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6

Canada

mtaboada@sfu.ca

Abstract

Before the US midterm elections of November 2014, the well-known women's magazine *Cosmopolitan* decided to include politics in its contents. The editorial board stated that their aim was to encourage readers to vote and to be engaged with women's rights advocay in the election process. To that end, *Cosmopolitan* created a new website, *CosmoVotes,* with content ranging from discussion of political issues to endorsement of specific candidates who were believed to advance women's issues. Topics include labour rights, abortion, contraception, health, minimum wage and social equity.

This paper evaluates the discourse of this new section of the *Cosmopolitan* website, together with readers' responses, concentrating on evaluative language. In particular, we are concerned with differences between the editorial position and readers' responses as viewed through the Appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005), and the role that verbal processes play in the expression of evaluative meanings. The corpus used for the analysis consists of a selection of articles and readers' opinions from *CosmoVotes*. The methodology is based on annotation of Appraisal

features and processes related to the interpersonal dimension of meaning. Those features reveal how attitudes are evaluated and capture ideological positionings in this discourse. Our results show that *CosmoVotes* has special characteristics, such as a predominance of high intensification in the readers' opinions, and strong negative judgements and expressions, while the magazine's pieces on political issues are more nuanced and eschew intensification.

Keywords: Appraisal theory, transitivity, *Cosmopolitan*, political discourse, evaluation, opinion

1 Introduction

This study analyzes, using corpus linguistics methods, the presence of evaluative polarities and semantic intensification related to gradable lexical items in the new political topic introduced by *Cosmopolitan* magazine during the US midterm elections in 2014, in an attempt to explore the presence of attitudes in political discourse, and in readers' reactions to articles on politics.

The main goal of our analysis is to reveal how positive and negative Appraisal is presented in *Cosmopolitan*'s series of articles about the 2016 American midterm elections. We also compare the linguistic evaluation present in the body of the article with comments from the readers in each article. We try to answer three main questions: How is the position of women in politics evaluated in *Cosmopolitan*? How do readers react to this editorial position? Are there linguistic differences between readers' opinions and editorial content? The results of this study allow us to explore the evaluative nature of political discourse, and how that evaluation is present in the new online genre of readers' comments.

2 *Cosmopolitan* and *CosmoVotes*

In 2014, the US edition of *Cosmopolitan* magazine included a new section on its website named *CosmoVotes,* also complemented with a Twitter presence, using hashtags such as *#politics, #elections* or *#cosmovotes.* The goal of this new section was to endorse specific candidates whom *Cosmopolitan* viewed as supportive of women's rights, and to encourage women, especially young women, to vote.

The different articles and interviews posted by *Cosmopolitan* highlight the importance of female participation in different social and private spheres across the United States. The articles in *CosmoVotes* defend the right of women to participate in the political process, and raise awareness toward that end. The most interesting aspect of this effort is that it is still quintessentially *Cosmopolitan*, that is, it retains the frivolous style that has been the mainstay of *Cosmopolitan's* persona for decades, with articles such as "9 Gorgeous Ways to Look Patriotic on Election Day" (Cardellino, 2014) or "The official #CosmoVotes drinking game for the 2014 midterm election" (Ahn, 2014) . In this section, we briefly describe the magazine itself, and its new foray into politics.

2.1   *Cosmopolitan* and the *Cosmo* universe

Cosmopolitan, or *Cosmo* to its followers, is known around the world as the prototypical women's magazine, focused on such inconsequential topics as clothes, make-up, celebrity gossip and sex. Published by the Hearst Group, *Cosmopolitan* is not just a magazine, but also a world unto itself, with editions in 35 languages, and a total of 61 print editions. This "Cosmoworld" has emerged from a variety of marketing products, a TV channel and some TV series, together with different social media channels. This means that the editorial board has multiple avenues to convey its ideological positioning about women,

a form of globalized discourse on women studied by Machin and Thornborrow (2003). Although *Cosmopolitan* is often ridiculed for its emphasis on sex and appearance, it is also one of the first magazines to promote and to defend a progressive and positive image for women, especially after a re-launch in the late 1960s, under the editorship of Helen Gurley Brown, a prominent feminist (Landers, 2010).

The US edition of *Cosmopolitan* has around 18 million readers, and the website Cosmopolitan.com has more than 20 million unique visitors a month[1]. The target audience consists of young women aged 18-34 years, not necessarily specialized in fashion or beauty products, but regular (or potential) consumers of such products.

2.2 *Cosmo* in politics

Cosmopolitan decided, in advance of the 2014 midterm Congressional elections to become involved in politics. To this end, they created a new web section on their website named *CosmoVotes.* The editors declared an intention to influence politics (Editors, 2014), announcing endorsements for candidates that "stand up for the issues that matter to us the most". In particular, the editors were interested in candidates' stands on abortion, equal pay for equal work, and minimum wage. Other issues of importance were: violence against women; responsible gun ownership; sexual assault, especially in colleges and the military; environment; and immigration. Editors are aware that the *Cosmopolitan* readership features low voting participation, and thus published articles encouraging their readers to vote. They target preconceptions about female participation in political life:

---

[1] Circulation and readership information in this section was culled from Cosmopolitan.com and from Hearst.com.

If you only listened to the pundits, you'd think young female voters were a lost cause this election season. We don't turn out for the midterms. We're single-lady "Beyoncé voters" who "depend on government because they're not depending on their husbands." We need politicians who will bring policy discussions "down to a woman's level" […]. (Editors, 2014)

In all, during the 2014 campaign, *CosmoVotes* endorsed fourteen candidates, all of them Democrats. They anticipated potential criticism, maybe from both the right and the left; from the right for their overall set of choices, and from the left for their perhaps less-than-progressive candidates:

We're supporting candidates who we believe will make significant changes that improve the status quo for women and whose opponents are potentially disastrous. And we're looking at candidates in context and recognizing that an incumbent representative from a liberal district in the Northeast may have more leeway to be a vocal proponent of women's rights than a challenger in a traditionally conservative area. (Editors, 2014)

Articles were written by the editorial team when they were endorsements, and by a roster of other authors on general issues, including prominent names such as Gloria Steinem.

Their efforts did not seem to have a strong impact: Of the fourteen candidates for Senate, Congress and Governor that *Cosmopolitan* endorsed, only three were elected. *Cosmopolitan* was, however, not discouraged. After a few months without postings, they

resumed publishing articles on the topic in April 2015, with the announcement of Hillary Clinton's run for president, and publication was steady in the lead-up to the 2016 presidential election, which turned out to involve issues of feminism, misogyny and the treatment of women in media more prominently than previous elections. Interestingly, however, comments on articles are no longer allowed and, as of August 2016, all previous comments were removed from the website.

2.3 **Reception of *CosmoVotes***

We are particularly interested in how readers react to *CosmoVotes* articles. Social media platforms have enabled the large-scale exchange of information, and the opinions of the general public have an increasingly important influence in our lives. Opinions expressed online can influence which restaurant we choose or which mobile phone we buy. Increasingly, online opinions also shape the political landscape, because they question, critique or in general evaluate events or facts presented by news journalists and political authorities.

For this reason, we believe that readers' comments posted in response to online articles constitute not only a new form of discourse, but also a valuable source of information on how readers view politics.

The immersion of *Cosmopolitan* into political opinion received a warm welcome by readers, most of them women, as we can glean from readers' comments of several articles from the *CosmoVotes* web section.

(1) **Lyn Bartlett** · Top Commenter · Santa Clara, California

LOVE IT that Cosmo is diving in to this very sensitive yet important issue. Keep up the good work!!

Reply · Like 👍 · 1 · November 7 at 1:59pm

(2) **Brooke Doris** · Top Commenter · Dallas, Texas

Thank you Cosmo for getting involved in issues that really matter to women! Bravo!

Reply · Like 👍 · 6 · Follow Post · October 7 at 4:00pm

Readers comment after the posts and present words of agreement, support and compliment for this new political focus. However, we also found negative opinions and arguments, about *Cosmopolitan* showing its colours too openly, as we can observe in the following comments about *CosmoVotes*:

(3) **John Vanis** · Top Commenter · CSUN

Any vote for a democrat this November is a vote for a lot more corruption and poverty.

Reply · Like 👍 · 1 · Follow Post · October 4 at 8:00am

(4) **Galilee McCarrell**

No conservatives featured here.
Not at all surprising.

Reply · Like 👍 · 3 · Follow Post · November 4 at 8:15pm

(5) **Elle Chanel** · Follow · Top Commenter

Cosmo is probably horrified, as we all are, that ANY woman would be a republican. Disgusting.

Reply · Like 👍 · 2 · November 5 at 7:14am

(6) **Jackie Ali** · Works at Papaya Clothing

Can Cosmo stop being political with their liberal biases and their claims of the Republican party and their 'war on women'? As a woman I have the right to be able to choose what party I want to be a part of, which is the Republican party. So sick of liberals putting conservative women down.

Reply · Like 👍 · 8 · Follow Post · November 6 at 8:40pm

In standard media outlets, *CosmoVotes* was not well received, with articles criticizing a customarily superficial magazine for trying to cover serious issues. Machin and Thornborrow (2006) argue that women's magazines, and in particular *Cosmopolitan,* have used sex as the only vehicle for female empowerment, and in this sense, women's

7

power is represented in fictionalised spaces constructed by this kind of discourse. If this is the case, then, the move by the *Cosmopolitan* editorial board is a bold one, a claim on power through other means than sex, and thus likely to be opposed by conservative media and audiences. Indeed, conservative media decried a move beyond *Cosmopolitan*'s traditional scope (Odell, 2014), and some of this criticism was featured in *CosmoVotes* articles.

Intrigued by this interesting discourse and social context, we set out to analyze the language of *CosmoVotes*, and in particular the reception it had among readers. In the next section, we describe the theoretical framework of our analysis, before outlining the corpus methodology in Section 4.

3 Theoretical framework: Systemic-functional approach, Appraisal and transitivity structure

Our analysis of the political section in *Cosmopolitan*'s website is based on two linguistic aspects: Appraisal and transitivity. These are all part of the theoretical apparatus of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The Appraisal framework is concerned with "how evaluation is established, amplified, targeted and sourced" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 9). Appraisal is related to the interpersonal dimension and is concerned with "the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 1).

Inside the Appraisal categorization of the language of subjectivity we find three main domains: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. *Attitude* is concerned with positive and negative emotional reactions, feelings, and evaluation of things. It can, in turn, be divided

into three systems: *Affect* contains the resources for construing feelings and emotional reactions (like happiness/unhappiness, satisfaction/insatisfaction, security/insecurity). *Judgement* is related to resources to assess behaviour according to different normative principles (social, moral, etc.). Finally, *Appreciation* encompasses resources to capture aesthetic valuation. Attitude is often seen as the central system within Appraisal, the way in which we can express feelings and evaluation of both people and things.

Engagement is concerned with a dialogic positioning of the speaker/writer. Engagement helps define how the speaker or writer views the opinion (e.g., as open to negotiation or not) through resources such as projection, modality and concession.

Finally, *Graduation* contains scales of Appraisal intensification degrees which can be high or low. *Graduation* is further subdivided into systems: *Focus* and *Force*. Through these two axes of scalability we can measure the intensification degree of an evaluation— how strong or weak the feeling is (Force) and the degree of prototypically (Focus). *Force* includes the analysis of intensification in gradable linguistic features through the presence of realizations such as intensification, comparatives, superlatives, linguistic repetitions, morphology and phonological features. Focus comprehends non-gradable linguistic features in which graduation can adjust the strength of boundaries. Within Focus we find *sharpen* (prototypical values), and *soften* (non-prototypical). Figure 1 presents a summary of the systems in Appraisal, with a few representative examples.

APPRAISAL

ENGAGEMENT
- monogloss (e.g. The Earth goes round the sun)
- heterogloss (e.g. Galileo: "And yet it moves.")

ATTITUDE
- AFFECT (e.g. happy, confident, sad, bored, interested)
- JUDGEMENT (e.g. courageous, irresponsible, right, wrong)
- APPRECIATION (e.g. yummy, simple, woolly, unbalanced)

GRADUATION
- FORCE
  - raise (e.g. jubilant)
  - lower (e.g. enthusiastic, but a little)
- FOCUS
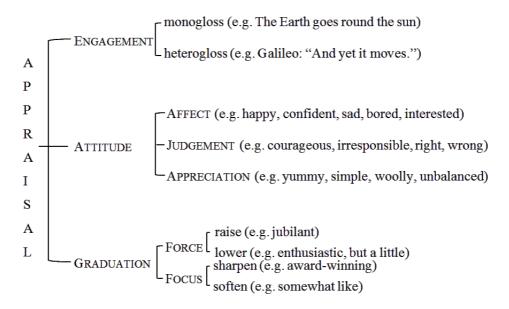 - sharpen (e.g. award-winning)
  - soften (e.g. somewhat like)

Figure 1. Main systems in the Appraisal framework, adapted from Martin and White (2005, p. 38)

To better understand how Appraisal is expressed, let us examine an example from the readers' comments section of a *CosmoVotes* article. In the example, we have underlined expressions of Appraisal.

(7) You are a <u>sexist asshole</u>. And what are you? A *<u>feminist</u>*, <u>lonely murderer</u>? I'd rather be a <u>sexist asshole</u> that supports human life and not murder. Thank you. That was <u>quite a compliment</u>, compared to the latter. (from Cosmovotes, November 2014).

In Example (7), the commenter expresses negative opinions related to the topic of abortion. Appraisal is presented through negative attitudes, mostly in the realm of Judgement. The terms *lonely murderer* and *sexist asshole* are both clear expressions of strong disagreement and almost disdain, although they characterize different voices in the abortion debate. The term *feminist* juxtaposed with *murderer* in this linguistic context also seems to hold negative sentiment. The adjectives *lonely* and *sexist* contribute to increasing the negative load of the already highly negative values in *murderer* and *asshole*. At the same time, *quite a* in *quite a compliment* semantically upgrades the

positive meaning of *compliment* if we read it isolated from the rest of the comment. But, in this case, it can be used (pragmatically) sarcastically surrounded by the linguistic context. Actually, *quite a compliment* refers to anything but a real compliment in this comment.

Our analysis also includes a study of Transitivity processes. Transitivity within Systemic Functional Linguistics is a system that, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 170), "construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types. Each process type provides its own model or schema for construing a particular domain of experience as a figure of a particular kind […]." In this sense, transitivity is characterized as providing "the lexicogrammatical resources for construing a quantum of change in the flow of events as a figure—as a configuration of elements centred on a process." Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 213). Transitivity is, therefore, related to the experiential dimension of meaning inside the clause, and it is realized through a process, the verbal component, in which Participants and Circumstances are involved.

'Process' refers to a semantic category that explains how phenomena of our experience of the world are construed as linguistic structure. Processes are classified into: material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal and existential. Material processes take place in clauses of 'doing-&-happening' (acting, doing, etc.), and they are concerned with events ('happening') or actions ('doing'). They involve a Participant or Participants (*Actor*) and a *Goal*.

Mental processes are about consciousness of the world (*Phenomenon*) and its internalization (*like, hate, remember*) by a *Sensor*. These processes are divided into

Perception Processes ('seeing'), Cognition Processes ('thinking'), Desiderative Processes ('wanting') and Emotive Processes ('loving').

Relational processes take place in clauses about 'being' and 'having'. They characterize and identify. Usually, these processes are realized by the verb *be*, and they have two inherent Participants because the relationship of being occurs between two entities. We find two categories: *attributive* (*Sarah is wise*) and *identifying* (*Sarah is the leader*) (Examples from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 265).

Behavioural processes are related to physiological and psychological behaviours which involve a *Behaver*. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 301), "they have no clearly defined characteristics of their own; rather, they are partly like the material and partly like the mental."

Verbal processes are realized by a verb about verbal activity (*speak, criticize, congratulate*) or semiosis (*say, tell*). They have a *Sayer*, in addition to *Receiver*, *Verbiage* and *Target*.

Finally, existential processes construct clauses about the existence or the happening of something. Just like relational processes, they also usually feature the verb *be* and the construction *there is/are* to indicate the feature of existence. The entity which is being said to exist is the *Existent*. This information is summarized in Figure 2.

PROCESS TYPE	Category meaning	Participants, directly involved	Participants, obliquely involved

material:
  action
  event
	'doing'
	  'doing'
	  'happening'
		Actor, Goal	Recipient, Client; Scope; Initiator;
			Attribute

behavioural	'behaving'	Behaver	Behaviour

mental:
  perception
  cognition
  desideration
  emotion
	'sensing'
	  'seeing'
	  'thinking'
	  'wanting'
	  'feeling'
		Senser, Phenomenon	Inducer

verbal	'saying'	Sayer, Target	Receiver; Verbiage

relational:
  attribution
  identification
	'being'
	  'attributing'
	  'identifying'
		Carrier, Attribute
		Identified, Identifier; Token, Value
			Attributor; Beneficiary
			Assigner

existential	'existing'	Existent	

Figure 2. Summary of processes, from Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 311)

In the following example we present a comment extracted from *Cosmovotes* during October 2014, with processes underlined.

(8) I kinda <u>like</u> the idea that they'<u>re</u> only liberal because they'<u>re</u> still young! I'<u>m</u> 70, and I <u>was beginning to think</u> that i'<u>m getting</u> old. This story <u>makes me feel</u> a lot better, in that regard! <u>Is there</u> something about <u>getting</u> old that's <u>supposed to make</u> you stupider? ;)

The processes underlined above can be analyzed into different types. First, we can find mental processes such as *like,* related to emotive processes, *was beginning to think*, related to cognitive processes, and *makes me feel*, which is a perceptive process. Second, there are relational processes: *they're* and *I'm,* that express characteristics related to the 'being' of an entity. There are also material processes, which are processes of 'doing', but also of 'happening'. In our example, *getting old* and *supposed to make* can be characterized as processes of happening. Finally, *Is there* is an existential process, capturing the existence of something.

The analysis of processes combined with some features of the Appraisal framework, in particular those related to up-scale and down-scale intensification, provide an enriched analysis that reveals how evaluation and subjectivity is presented in this type of discourse. The link between Transivity and Appraisal is well established, with the Transitivity structure revealing ways in which Appraisal expressions are connected (Caffarel & Rechniewski, 2009; Scott, 2008; Trckova, 2016). Dong (2009) characterizes it as the Appraisal system negotiating attitudes (interpersonal domain) about reality (experiential domain), which are then expressed through the system of Transitivity. The next section details the methodology that we followed to carry out the analysis.

4 Methodology

Evaluation in our corpus is analyzed through the annotation of structures and words presented in the discourse of the articles and comments. This analysis is fundamentally focused on adjectives (for Appraisal) and transitivity processes which carry high positive/negative evaluative loads. In this section, we discuss the corpus collection methodology and the annotation of the relevant linguistic features.

4.1 Corpus

Our corpus consists of 80 articles published online in the *CosmoVotes* section[2] of the *Cosmopolitan* website during 2014. At the same time we collected the articles, we also downloaded all the comments associated with each article. Table 1 shows the number of

---

[2] *CosmoVotes*: http://www.cosmopolitan.com/elections/

articles, and their size in words and sentences. Size was calculated using UAM CorpusTool (O'Donnell, 2008), which is the tool that we used to organize and annotate the corpus.

	Total number	Words	Sentences
Articles	80	50,883	4,225
Comments	990	60,809	11,276

Table 1. Corpus size

Within the *CosmoVotes* section, articles can be further classified into different topics. After reading all of the articles, and based on their content and the main goal of the article, we classified them into six different topics: election, female vote, endorsement, labour, abortion and CosmoVotes.

The articles labelled 'election' contain *Cosmopolitan*'s ideas and opinions on the current situation during the campaign. They may include quotes from candidates' speeches or details on the electoral campaign.

The topic 'female vote' is related to articles that present the social and political situation of women, and how their vote can make a difference, first of all through participation (candidates will be forced to listen to women during the campaign, and propose female-friendly initiatives), and second through voting for pro-women candidates.

'Endorsement' articles are all written by "The Editors", and they endorse men and women who are believed to support women's rights. Candidates were selected for different types of positions: Senate, Congress and Governor. The articles are persuasive in nature, in that they try to convince the reader to vote for the candidate, and provide

arguments for the endorsement.

A number of articles cover the topics 'abortion' and 'labour'. Abortion was a particularly relevant topic in the state of Texas, where there is a strong Republican presence, opposed to abortion. In this state, Wendy Davies was the candidate for the Democrat party. In 2013, she campaigned against, and filibustered, a proposed Texas law to further restrict access to safe abortions. The last topic, labour is more general, discussing women's participation in the labour force, and differences in wages when compared to men.

Finally, we selected a group of articles under the topic 'CosmoVotes'. These articles encompass a mix of different characteristics and subtopics created by the editors. 'CosmoVotes' includes ideas, interviews, beauty tips and everything about the elections, in particular efforts to get the vote out, and encourage (young) women to go to the polls on election day. These are light-hearted and funny articles, sometimes frivolous, with titles such as: *This Hilarious Makeup Tutorial Explains Why It's So Important for Women to Vote This Year; The Official #CosmoVotes Drinking Game for the 2014 Midterm Election;* or *36 Celebrities Who Want You to Vote: seriously, if Kim Kardashian can find the time to vote then* so can you[3].

This group of articles seem to imitate the usual style of *Cosmopolitan* discourse that is mostly addressed to women interested in fashion trends, sex and fitness advice. We consider that the presence of these articles is a reminder of the editorial board style, which presents something frivolous and artificial in the middle of the newest "serious" political

---

[3] Emphasis on *so can you* in the original (http://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/news/a32831/midterm-elections-cosmovotes-celebrity-voters/).

section to keep the attention of the readers. In this sense, these articles reveal the particular type of discourse that characterizes *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

We mentioned above that endorsement articles are written by the section editors. Other writers are mostly women, with two men contributing occasionally.

We now move on to discuss readers' comments to the articles. Articles tend to have quite a high number of comments, but with clear differences based on topic. In Table 2, we show the number of articles by topic, those that have comments, and, finally the size of the comments for each topic, in number of words. We can see that 'abortion' has the higher amount of words in comments, although the 'election' topic has more articles, and a higher percentage of them with comments. Abortion is clearly a controversial topic, and one where readers engage with each other in the comments section. On the other hand, 'CosmoVotes', the more light and entertaining topic, has very few comments and number of words in those comments.

	Election	Female vote	Endorse-ment	Labour	Abortion	Cosmo-Votes
Articles by topic	34	14	13	2	10	7
Articles with comments	13	10	5	1	3	2
Words in comments	24,064	10,107	1,761	481	24,204	192

Table 2. Articles with comments, and total number of words in the comments

4.2 Appraisal and transitivity annotations

As we mentioned in Section 3, the Appraisal framework postulates three main systems which divide the labour of expressing evaluation—Engagement, Attitude and Graduation.

Our focus is on the latter two. First of all, we study Attitude, because it is the basic vehicle for conveying subjectivity and evaluation. Second, we add Graduation because it contributes to intensifying or downtoning Attitude expressions. While the study of Engagement is certainly worthwhile, we feel that it would add an extra layer of complication to our analysis, and therefore we postpone it for now. We summarize the specific aspects annotated in our data in Figure 3, following Taboada, Carretero, and Hinnell (2014).
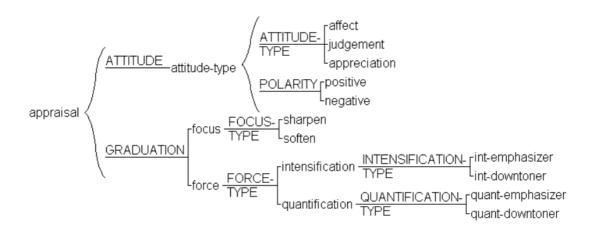

Figure 3. Appraisal scheme used for annotation

The second prong of our analysis is the study of transitivity in the articles, in particular processes, following Halliday and Mathiessen's (2014) typology of verbal processes. We categorized all the processes in the articles and comments according to type of process. In addition, and to link this analysis to Appraisal, we added a label to indicate whether the process was positive or negative, i.e., whether it conveyed a positive or negative Attitude. We consider, for instance, that processes such as *love, adore, smile* or *help* tend to be positive because are related to emotions, feelings and, in general, attitudes that express positivity, whereas *kill*, *cry*, *hate* or *refuse* show negative attitudes. The annotation scheme for transitivity is presented in Figure 4.
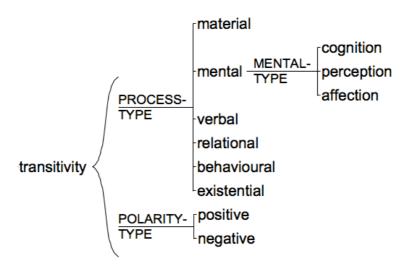
Figure 4. Transitivity annotation scheme with polarity values

This analysis framework allows us to create a web of semantic relations between processes and their positive or negative values, which, together with the Attitude and Graduation systems from Appraisal, provide a rich set of data to analyze the subjectivity of *CosmoVotes.*

5 Analysis and Results

Our analysis of both articles and comments in *CosmoVotes* is divided in two . First, , we present the results of our analysis following the Appraisal framework. Second, we show the analysis of processes in *CosmoVotes.*

5.1 Appraisal analysis

In order to gain a deeper understanding of evaluation in the articles, we carried out a manual annotation of Appraisal features in the corpus (those in the Attitude and Graduation systems). In the manual annotation, the authors (as annotators) take into account the context in which words occur, and consider not just words in isolation, but

the entire phrase or expression in which they appear. This allows us to assess the true polarity of a word. For instance, the word *feminist* is quite loaded with different meanings, and can be used positively (*a proud feminist*) or negatively (*an angry feminist*) depending on the context. Additionally, by looking at words in their context, we can assess the impact of intensifiers, downtoners, negation and other sources of information that may alter the polarity or strength of a word (Taboada, Brooke, Tofiloski, Voll, & Stede, 2011; Taboada & Trnavac, 2013).

General results are presented in Table 3, divided by presence of Appraisal in articles and comments. Percentages refer to each heading, i.e., percentage of Affect is with respect to Attitude; percentage of Force is with respect to the total presence of Graduation. Raw numbers, i.e., *n* refers to segments where Appraisal was present. Those may be words, phrases, or entire clauses. In both articles and comments, we analyzed only segments that seem to emanate from the writer, excluding quotes, material from advertisements, or material reported from other sources (such as poll results).

	Articles		Comments	
	n	%	*n*	%
ATTITUDE				
Affect	8	3.19%	73	15.37%
Judgement	110	43.82%	316	66.53%
Appreciation	133	52.99%	86	18.11%
GRADUATION				
Force	154	82.80%	165	88.71%
Focus	32	17.20%	21	11.29%
FORCE				
Intensification	123	79.87%	138	83.64%
Quantification	31	20.13%	27	16.36%
POLARITY				
Positive	87	34.66%	56	11.79%
Negative	164	65.34%	420	88.21%
INTENSIFICATION				
Up-Scale	118	95.93%	135	99.27%
Down-Scale	5	4.07%	3	0.73%

Table 3. Appraisal results

We can see in the table that the most important Attitude type is Appreciation, with Judgement a close second. This is reversed in the comments, where Judgement is the most important, by far. In other words, articles are more or less split between expressing Appreciation (towards candidates, ideas or even beauty tips) and judging other people's behaviour. Editors seem to express *Cosmopolitan* ideas about politics through appreciative feelings and making judgements instead of presenting affective linguistic expressivity, as we observe in these examples: "*Voting is beautiful*", "*something horrible has happened*" (both Appreciation) or "*She could even simply speak out more about abortion being morally wrong*." (Judgement).

Comments, on the other hand, are primarily judgmental, and quite often of other commenters. For instance, in one case, a commenter states about another commenter "*You are an embarrassment*". There is also a higher proportion of Affect in comments, reflecting their personal, informal style.

Second, we focused on the two types of Force (quantification and intensification) and measured their polarities. The presence of gradable features (Table 3) reveals a clear linguistic inclination to intensify adjectives and linguistic structures increasing their meanings by up-scale intensification (intensifiers accompanying selected adjectives underlined): "*be <u>very</u> afraid people*", "*why are <u>the most highly</u> educated people overwhelmingly <u>liberal?</u>*", "*Literally <u>EVERYTHING</u> they believe is completely <u>fucked</u>.*"

In general, there is linguistic force in both articles and comments, although its presence is higher in comments. In addition, the relation between upscale and downscale linguistic intensification and positive and negative polarity seems to reveal a higher negative intensification in the discourse of *CosmoVotes*. This intensification is achieved through the use of superlative structures, emphatic clauses, prefixes, intensifiers or terms with strong evaluative meaning, all of them commonly used by readers. For instance, the term *stupid* in Example (9) has a strong evaluative content, and can be considered the highest in a group that may also contain *unintelligent, dumb* or *thick*, which are all related words according to WordNet (Fellbaum, 1998). Similarly, in (10), *depressed* as *asinine* are intensified in their very nature, a form of intensification that Martin and White (2005) characterize as infusion, that is, one that is not expressed by using separate intensifying adverbs, but through the place where the term is on a scale.

(9)   One doesn't have to be <u>stupid</u> to be a conservative, but it sure seems that way.

(10) I should have known better than to read this article. Stick to sex, Cosmo. From what
      I see, it's about all you're good at. The broad assumption that the GOP wants to see
      women's wages depressed is asinine. This article makes me sick in SO many ways.

These examples show intensified attitudes, mostly negative. This is a common trend
in online comments, one that newsmedia and the public are increasingly concerned about.
In recent months, some newspapers have stopped allowing readers' comments, because
of the increase in workload to moderate them, and the potential for lawsuits and backlash,
since many of the comments are deeply offensive, racist, misogynistic, or simply *ad
hominem* attacks (Chen, 2017; Cooke, 2015; Farhi, 2014; Sunyer, 2014). The leading UK
newspaper *The Guardian* published a study of over 70 million comments by its readers
(Gardiner et al., 2016). In particular, they analyzed the 1.4 million comments that had
been blocked by moderators because they contained abuse of some form or other. They
discovered that abuse was mostly found in comments to articles written by women and
minorities: Of the 10 most abused writers, eight were women, and the other two were
black men.

We see this trend in our analysis of comments. Not only do they contain more
subjectivity than the articles themselves, but they also contain more Judgement and more
intensified negative Appraisal, almost all of it in the form of up-scale intensification.

5.2   Transitivity processes in *CosmoVotes*

In this last section of analysis, we present our application of the typology of transitivity
processes to evaluate the discourse of *CosmoVotes*. As with Appraisal, we analyzed
process type only for clauses that were attributable to the author of either the article or

the comment, excluding quotes. We also only consider processes that have a clear evaluative polarity, positive or negative.

Table 4 shows the analysis of both articles and comments, broken down by type of process, and by how many of those processes were positive or negative. For example, in the *CosmoVotes* corpus, material processes are verbs such as *pay*, *give, end up* or *engage*. Of those, *give* and *engage* convey positive Appraisal, whereas *pay* and *end up* express negative Appraisal. We carried out this analysis also using the CorpusTool annotation, and our own insights about which processes were positive or negative in the context in which they appear. In all cases, the decision was clear, and we are confident that the analysis is reproducible. Where there is no percentage reported for a process type, as for mental-cognitive, it is because none of the processes under that category had clear polarity.

	Articles			Comments		
	n	% positive	% negative	*n*	% positive	% negative
Material	1443	28%	5%	3309	13%	37%
Mental	299	12%	3%	1027	6%	11%
Mental-cognitive	35	-	-	249	-	-
Mental-perceptive	18	8%	2%	119	2%	3%
Mental-affect	7	4%	1%	206	4%	8%
Verbal	249	-	-	427	-	-
Relational	485	-	-	1128	-	-
Behavioral	72	44%	56%	244	19%	95%
Existential	41	-	-	93	-	-

Table 4. Transitivity processes in articles and comments

First, focusing on the articles, the processes that have a stronger presence are material,

followed by mental, relational and verbal. Some of the other processes, on the other hand, are quite infrequent, including mental-affect and existential processes. Material processes are mostly related to actions to be undertaken by either readers or politicians: *go, vote, make, run*.

Some of the processes convey clear positive or negative polarity. This is the case with behavioural processes, which seem to be more frequently negative such as *lie*, *murdering*, *cry*. Material processes are more frequently positive, with encouraging messages and calls to action, as is the case in the underlined verbs in the following examples.

(11) The heads of Planned Parenthood, NARAL, and the Center for Reproductive Rights spoke to Cosmopolitan.com about why Congress needs to <u>pass</u> a law protecting women's rights.

(12) We <u>GIVE</u> rights. We do not take away rights.

Mental processes are less frequent. These are affective, perceptive and cognitive verbs such as *love, want, hate*, *see* or *believe*. The cognitive type is used to reflect the editors' opinions, with expressions such as *we think; we believe,* but polarity for those tends to depend on their Participants and Circumstances, rather than being inscribed in the Process.

Second, with respect to processes in comments, the distribution is quite different. There is also a higher number of material processes than any other process, but in comments they are mostly negative, conveying meanings such as *destroy* or *pay.*

Other processes such as mental, relational and behavioural processes have a notable presence in comments. In particular, there is a relevant number of mental cognitive

processes such as *think, believe, hope, mean*, *know*, which help convey the readers' opinions, as we see in the following examples.

(13) I don't even <u>believe</u> in abortion at all, but birth control is a woman's right and must not be SINGLED OUT as different from anything else.

(14) So sorry for you/ Your premiums are higher because you <u>think</u> men deserve more than you.

(15) I <u>think</u> you are <u>misunderstanding</u> something.

Commenters use these kinds of processes to express what they think about the topic of the article but also what they think about the positions of other readers.

Apart from relational processes, which are not measured with negative or positive polarity because they are related to other categories like attribution or identification, the other processes present a higher negative than positive degree. In this way, these results seem to be related to the attitudes of readers that comment ideas and argue from different points of view about politics and other controversial topics. Sometimes, they present political disagreement between liberal and conservative ideas which is reflected through negative processes:

(16) Miscarriage is not a choice to <u>kill</u> your unborn child.

(17) Raising the minimum wage means EVERYONE <u>gets hurt</u>, a ton of people <u>will loose</u> there jobs. [sic]

We can also find processes related to affection and feelings such as: "*It disgusts me*", "*Surely you love babies more than you hate rates*", "*sorry all you crazy evangelists...*".

The analysis of process types shows a clear difference between articles and comments, as did the Appraisal analysis. Behavioural processes, which are typically used to convey Judgement in the *CosmoVotes* corpus, are disproportionately negative in comments, but more evenly split between positive and negative in articles.

6 Conclusions

Our analysis of Appraisal expressions and processes reveals a characterization of the discourse of *CosmoVotes*, as well as the differences and similarities between articles and comments.

First, on the one hand, the relative proportion of positive and negative words is quite different in articles and in comments. The articles contain more positive expressions, for most of the topics presented in the articles. The presence of negative and upscale intensified attitude is, however, higher in the articles, in particular as regards the negative attitude related to the Appreciation of negative social values. As we note in Section 5.1, Appreciation predominates, followed by attitudes of Judgement. These features reveal that the editors do not have a positive point of view of the current situation for women in the US as voters and political leaders.

On the other hand, Judgement with a strong negativity is predominant in comments, as compared to Affect and Appreciation. Readers of *CosmoVotes* judge each other, taking as point of departure their view of the political panorama in the US or their political positions. Examples of such judgements in the comments are "sorry all you crazy evangelists..." or "those who are rabid baby killers will not ever understand the meaning of your words."

Second, in both articles and comments, negative expressions appear with a higher

degree of up-scale intensification, in particular with negative attitudes of Appreciation and Judgement. These results demonstrate that, especially the commenters view negatively the political situation, female participation in elections, and some of the views of *Cosmopolitan's* editorial board. In addition, the comments also contain high degrees of negative attitude towards other commenters, indicating disagreement between readers.

Our analysis of transitivity processes reveals that material and behavioral processes present negative polarity in the comments, which means that readers criticize those actions and performances/behaviours of political candidates that affect women's rights. We believe that the analyses of Appraisal and Transitivity contribute to characterize the connection between the interpersonal and experiential dimensions of meaning in this discourse. In this sense, the presence of relational processes in the articles which are related to attribution and identification can be linked to the Appreciation category in Appraisal. Using relational processes, editors express Appreciation with respect to a particular political situation, to what the candidates are like, or what they have to be like: "*Kay Hagan is the best choice for the state*", "*voting is beautiful.*" At the same time, this values function as a token of Judgement, which overlaps with Appreciation.

In this sense, according to Thompson (2014), attitude presents different levels of complexity when it is activated by different elements (tokens) within the discourse. This author introduces the 'Russian doll' dilemma to explain that explicit attitudes can trigger invoked attitudes:

An expression of one category of attitude may function as a token (an indirect expression9 of a different category; and that token may itself function as an indirect expression of yet another category and so on (Thompson, 2014: 49).

This shows the complex process of interpretation of discourse, where different layers of attitude can be linked and interrelated, and revealing different possible meanings/aspects at the same time.

With respect to Transitivity in the comments, the attitude expressed through negative Judgement can be related to the number of negative behavioural and material processes. Readers judge the political positioning of other readers and also of *CosmoVotes*.

(18) "YOU ARE FULL OF SHIT AND DUMBER THAN A BOX OF ROCKS", "every woman would be guilty of murder", "They are crazy and dangerous", "You're killing off human life."

In summary, we would like to highlight the relevance of both frameworks as useful tools in the analysis of this new form of online discourse. The analysis provides a characterization of the types of attitudes that are expressed in the *CosmoVotes* political, and a methodology to understand the way editors and commenters express their ideology, and their interpretation of the social and political situation of women in the United States.

Future work will extend both types of analysis. The Appraisal analysis can be extended to Engagement, which would help highlight how readers interact with the magazine, and with each other. The transitivity analysis can be extended so that not only processes, but also Participants and Circumstances are included. Another avenue we would like to explore is the characterization of readers' comments as a genre, following research in well-established genres (Eggins, 1994; Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin & Rose, 2008) and in emerging genres, such as online consumer reviews (Vásquez, 2014).

References

Ahn, L. (2014). The official #CosmoVotes drinking game for the 2014 midterm election. *Cosmopolitan, November 4, 2014*. Retrieved from http://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/news/a32830/cosmovotes-drinking-game/

Caffarel, A., & Rechniewski, E. (2009). A systemic functional approach to analysing and interpreting ideology: An illustration from French editorials. *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses, 22*, 27-43.

Cardellino, C. (2014). 9 gorgeous ways to look patriotic on election day. *Cosmopolitan, October 31, 2014*. Retrieved from http://www.cosmopolitan.com/style-beauty/beauty/news/a32713/american-patriotic-beauty-looks/

Chen, A. (2017). The human toll of protecting the Internet from the worst of humanity. *The New Yorker*, January 28, 2017. Retrieved from http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-human-toll-of-protecting-the-internet-from-the-worst-of-humanity

Cooke, M. (2015). Toronto Star closes commenting on thestar.com. *Toronto Star*, December 16, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.thestar.com/news/2015/12/16/toronto-star-closing-commenting-on-thestarcom.html

Dong, A. (2009). *The Language of Design: Theory and Computation*. Berlin: Springer.

Editors, T. (2014). #CosmoVotes: How we decided which midterm candidates are the best for women. *Cosmopolitan, September 8, 2014*. Retrieved from http://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/news/a30831/cosmo-votes-endorsements/

Eggins, S. (1994). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. London: Pinter.

Eggins, S., & Slade, D. (1997). *Analysing Casual Conversation*. London: Cassell.

Farhi, P. (2014). Some news sites cracking down on over-the-top comments. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/some-news-sites-cracking-down-on-over-the-top-comments/2014/05/07/4bc90958-d619-11e3-95d3-3bcd77cd4e11_story.html

Fellbaum, C. (Ed.). (1998). *WordNet: An Electronic Lexical Database*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Gardiner, B., Mansfield, M., Anderson, I., Holder, J., Louter, D., & Ulmanu, M. (2016). The dark side of Guardian comments. *The Guardian*, April 12, 2016. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments

Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1st ed.). London: Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (4th ed.). London: Arnold.

Landers, J. (2010). *The Improbably First Century of Cosmopolitan Magazine*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.

Machin, D., & Thornborrow, J. (2003). Branding and discourse: The case of *Cosmopolitan*. *Discourse and Society, 14*(4), 453-471.

Machin, D., & Thornborrow, J. (2006). Lifestyle and the depoliticisation of agency: Sex as power in women's magazines. *Social Semiotics, 16*(1), 173-188.

Martin, J. R., & Rose, D. (2008). *Genre Relations: Mapping Culture*. London: Equinox.

Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The Language of Evaluation*. New York: Palgrave.

O'Donnell, M. (2008). Demonstration of the UAM CorpusTool for text and image annotation *Proceedings of the Association for Computational Linguistics, Demo Session* (pp. 13-16). Columbus, OH.

Odell, A. (2014). Fox News: Women don't want to read about politics, they just want to "check out the latest fashions". *Cosmopolitan, September 11, 2014*. Retrieved from http://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/news/a30994/fox-news-host-women-dont-want-to-read-about-politics-they-just-want-fashion-tips/

Scott, C. (2008). Construing attitude and experience in discourse: The interaction of the Transitivity and Appraisal systems. In C. Jones & E. Ventola (Eds.), *From Language to Multimodality: New Developments in the Study of Ideational Meaning* (pp. 87-109). London: Equinox.

Sunyer, J. (2014). The threat facing online comments. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/9c0cf256-e197-11e3-b7c4-00144feabdc0.html

Taboada, M., Brooke, J., Tofiloski, M., Voll, K., & Stede, M. (2011). Lexicon-based methods for sentiment analysis. *Computational Linguistics, 37*(2), 267-307.

Taboada, M., Carretero, M., & Hinnell, J. (2014). Loving and hating the movies in English, German and Spanish. *Languages in Contrast, 14*(1), 127-161.

Taboada, M., & Trnavac, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Nonveridicality and evaluation: Theoretical, computational and corpus approaches*. Leiden: Brill.

Thompson, G. (2014). Affect and emotion, target-value mismatches, and Russian dolls: Refining the Appraisal model. In G. Thompson & L. Alba-Juez (Eds.), *Evaluation in Context* (pp. 47-66). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Trckova, D. (2016). Representations of nature in ecotourism advertisements. *Discourse and Interaction, 9*(1), 79-94.

Vásquez, C. (2014). *The Discourse of Online Consumer Reviews*. London: Bloomsbury.