Politicizing, Personalizing, and Mobilizing in Online Political Communication: Drivers and Killers of Users' Engagement

MILICA VUCKOVIC[♦][1]
University of Zagreb, Croatia

This article analyzes strategies and tactics used in online political communication. It examines political actors' communication traits and how they affect Facebook users' engagement. The focus of the article lies on different dimensions of personalization and how they are used as tactics. To answer these questions, I conducted a manual content analysis of posts from Barack Obama's and David Cameron's Facebook pages published from 2008 to 2016. Negative binomial regressions were used to estimate the effects of different predictors of users' engagement. The findings suggest that both leaders used Facebook primarily as a tool to communicate about political topics, mobilize supporters, and display their political and private virtues. In the context of personalization of communication, the study identifies three main levels of privatization—low, medium, and high. Furthermore, the analysis of users' interactions on Facebook pages (likes, comments, and shares) revealed that citizens preferred privatized and emotionalized posts.

Keywords: Barack Obama, David Cameron, Facebook, online engagement, personalization, online political communication

Technology has been progressively expanding and developing, connectivity has surpassed all expectations, and social networks have irreversibly infiltrated politics and become an integral part of it. The appearance of politicians on social media has contributed to the professionalization of online communication and election campaigns (Kreiss, 2014; Stromer-Galley, 2014). Yet, trends on social media are changing so rapidly that it took only a few years for the communication paradigm to shift from Obama's professional online communication with standardized messages and research-based methods to Trump and his furious, "authentic" tweets, based on gut-feeling (Enli, 2017). Professionalization, permanent campaigning, informalization, amateurism, and authenticity, followed by the growing importance of social media logic and the phenomenon of personalization, sum up well the main trends in contemporary political communication, fostered by the rise of social media.

Milica Vuckovic: milica.vuckovic@fpzg.hr
Date submitted: 2022-02-14

The literature in the field of online political communication investigates how politicians communicate in the online sphere using different platforms, especially during election periods (Bronstein, 2013; Enli, 2017; Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019). Research on new forms of online users' engagement such as reacting with different emojis, commenting, sharing, signing online petitions, organizing online events, among others, is also growing (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015). At the same time, the effects of different strategies and tactics used in online political communication on new ways of citizens' engagement, especially during nonelection periods, are understudied. Only recently have scholars tried to grasp how, if at all, specific content, and different formats of content presentation influence users' engagement in elections (Bene et al., 2022; Gerbaudo, Marogna, & Alzetta, 2019; McGregor, Lawrence, & Cardona, 2017), nonelection periods (Bene, 2017; Heiss, Schmuck, & Matthes, 2019; Metz, Kruikemeier, & Lecheler, 2020), and both between routine periods and election periods (Jost, 2023; Peeters, Opgenhaffen, Kreutz, & Van Aelst, 2023). These studies focus on how emotional appeals are used in communication and how users respond to them; how private issues trigger interactions; and how political topics and campaigning affect online popularity (Bene et al., 2022; Gerbaudo et al., 2019; Jost, 2023; Metz et al., 2020). While they scrutinize the communication of multiple politicians participating in specific elections, no study has attempted to analyze politicians' communication from the period they started using Facebook to their last days in office. Moreover, only in a recent study by Peeters and colleagues (2023) Facebook posts of political actors were analyzed during election and routine times, looking at the political and private content in posts, content related to campaigning, and emotionality. However, their study only looks at the textual parts of posts, which poses a challenge in coding emotions. There might be a difference in terms of meaning and content between the textual and visual messages of a Facebook post. For instance, sometimes the whole post is just an image, or an image that has text embedded in the photo (infographics, memes, picture quotes). The present study goes beyond the existing literature to scrutinize both textual and visual elements of Facebook posts, both in election and routine times, and draws on a larger sample to look at the different trends in online communication and how they impact users' engagement.

Therefore, this study aims to first analyze the communication of Barack Obama and David Cameron on their Facebook pages from 2008 to 2016[2] and answer the following question: For what purposes did Barack Obama and David Cameron use Facebook? Second, it aims to analyze the character and intensity of personalization in their online communication. Third, it examines which traits worked well to encourage or discourage citizens' engagement on their Facebook pages. Users' responsiveness, that is, engagement, is measured in the number of likes, comments, and shares.

Obama and Cameron were chosen for the analysis for several reasons. First, Obama will continue to grab the attention of political and communication scientists and the wider public for many years to come. Although he has not been in power for several years now, his legacy is still widely studied (Anderson, 2019; DeVinney, 2021; Theodoropoulou, 2020). At the same time, U.K. prime ministers are interesting cases for studying political communication because the United Kingdom is, alongside the United States, a cradle of contemporary political communication (Rahat & Kenig, 2018). Second, in the context of the personalization of politics, the United States is an interesting case because of its presidential system in which personalization

---

[2] This article builds on the topic of the author's doctoral dissertation (Vuckovic, 2020).

occurs more often than in other political systems (Adam & Maier, 2010). Although the United Kingdom has a parliamentary system, many scholars find that personalization is often present in different shapes in the country (Langer, 2010). Third, in the context of social media, these two cases are particularly interesting because Obama is often called the "social media president" because his team was so skilled in using social media (Katz, Barris, & Jain, 2013, p. 128) and in 2015, Cameron hired Obama's former campaign manager and social media strategist, Jim Messina, who is often given credit for Obama's victory in the 2012 presidential election (Stratton, 2013). The opportunity to compare the communication of two globally important politicians when both were in power at the same time and occupied the same social media platform for which they used the services of the same social media adviser is a unique coincidence. Finally, as studies about the role of populism and populist style of communication together with the negativity in communication are expanding (Bene et al., 2022), it is relevant to look at politicians who used different styles of communication and were successful, at least in terms of winning elections twice in a row. This study aims to reveal which strategies and tactics they used on Facebook to spread their messages.

Social Media Functions in Political Communication

Social media enable politicians to mobilize supporters, build public image, promote issues and programs, influence the public agenda, and directly communicate with citizens. The role of social media in political communication is often reduced to their broadcasting and interaction functions wherein the broadcasting function is defined "as a form of unidirectional communication and the behaviors listed under it," while interaction consists of "behaviors that are based on reciprocity and are typically about engaging others." (Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff, & van 't Haar, 2013, p. 704) Authors differentiate among five broadcasting behaviors: Updating from the campaign trail; promotion, which includes tweets in which a candidate promotes him/herself, a fellow politician, the party, or another organization; critiquing; information dissemination; and position taking. Peeters and colleagues (2023) regrouped these functions into three categories: Campaign information, privatized messages, and political messages of substance. Similarly, McGregor and colleagues (2017) classified politicians' Facebook posts of major-party candidates in the 2014 gubernatorial races in the United States into four categories: Personal, campaign, policy, and off-topic.

Although broadcasting on social media is still the most used function, it is the interaction function that differentiates new media from the old ones because politicians can now interact with citizens in numerous new ways. Graham and colleagues (2013) studied different types of interactions or ways in which politicians communicate to encourage two-way communication, discussion, conversation, and engagement. They indicate five types of interaction: Attacking/debating; acknowledging; advice giving; consulting, which included requests for public inputs; and organizing/mobilizing. Mobilizing and organizing include tweets of candidates calling for direct action, typically to sign a petition or to join the campaign trail (Graham et al., 2013).

Following Peeters and colleagues (2023), this article makes a threefold distinction of social media functions: Politicizing, personalizing, and mobilizing. The politicizing function in this context refers to communicating political questions and topics. It also includes campaigning and campaign activities. The personalizing function is related to the concept of personalization of political communication, and it encompasses everything related to politicians' personae, their political and private profiles. Mobilizing is defined as politicians' focus on citizens or more precisely, Facebook fans. The mobilizing function refers to

invitations for interaction, engagement, and action in general, either online or offline. To analyze these three functions in this article, I ask the following research question:

RQ1:   To what extent did Barack Obama and David Cameron use the politicizing, personalizing, and mobilizing function of social media on their Facebook pages?

Additionally, as personalization comes in different shapes (visibility, privatization, popularization, authenticity), the following sub-question is of interest:

SRQ1:   What was the character and intensity of personalization on Obama's and Cameron's Facebook pages?

Interactivity on Facebook

This article discusses the interaction function in terms of political actors' intention and willingness to invite, involve, and engage in conversation with citizens. Yet, another dimension of interactivity, which is one of the main and unique characteristics of social media platforms, is users' engagement. This article looks at the connection between different functions and strategies used in Facebook posts and users' interactions.

Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015) were among the first to study the connection between the content and rhetoric used in Facebook posts—including photographs and interactivity—expressed in the form of likes, shares, and comments. Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015) explain why people like something, saying that "like" is an expression of the endorsement of posted content, an expression of affirmation, and an acceptance of what the post conveys. Sharing is another way of engaging. Sharing is a stronger form of engagement compared with liking because it hints that people want others to know what they endorsed. In this constellation, commenting can be considered the strongest form of "reacting" on Facebook because it assumes an action that is more demanding than only pressing a "button."

The objective of most politicians present on social media is to get as many likes, shares, comments, followers, and views as possible: "In general, we can argue that more engagement by the public on social media means that politicians are performing better in terms of audience response and have an effective online communication strategy" (Peeters et al., 2023, p. 1). As Jost (2023) explains, if politicians seek publicity via mass media, they will use communication strategies that meet the criteria of journalistic selection: "By contrast, if they strive to spread messages on social media, then they should use communication strategies and message features that increase user interactions with their messages" (p. 4). Therefore, I formulate a second research question:

RQ2:   Which communication strategies and message features encourage or discourage citizens to engage on the Facebook pages of Barack Obama and David Cameron?

The next section formulates expectations derived from the existing literature and proposes several hypotheses.

Personalization and Privatization

The phenomenon of personalization of politics relates to the growing importance of individual politicians in decision making, voting behavior, and political communication (Holtz-Bacha, Langer, & Merkle, 2014). Personalization of political communication is additionally defined as the growing visibility of candidates in the media coverage of politics, and the growing visibility of candidates in the strategic communication of parties, wherein visibility may refer to "political personality traits" and/or "private personality traits" (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014, p. 156). This first aspect of personalization, that is, a growing focus on individual politicians in the media coverage at the expense of parties or governments as collectives, is also known as individualization (Van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2012). The second aspect of personalization of political communication, that is, increased media interest in the private lives of politicians and strategic use of elements from their private life by politicians themselves, is called "privatization of politicians" (Holtz-Bacha, 2004, p. 48) or "politicization of private personae" (Langer, 2010, p. 61).

This study concerns the strategic dimension of personalization of political communication in the context of social media platforms (Bronstein, 2013; Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015; Metz et al., 2020). Social media personalize political communication more than ever (Ekman & Widhlom, 2014; Metz et al., 2020; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013). Ekman and Widholm (2014) find that "the palpable focus on politicians' personal characteristics, rather than the politics they represent, seems to be a growing trend in political communications practice on social media platforms" (p. 520). In this context, Enli (2017) talks about the "era of social media" (p. 52), which has emerged from the 2010s onward. According to Enli (2017), this era is characterized by "personalization, anti-elitism or populism in political communication on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram" (p. 52) and features elements of interactivity and Web 2.0 features.

Moreover, some authors believe that social media have enabled politicians to appear as ordinary people living simple and ordinary lives like their voters. This helped them become humanized and to appear as "one of us" (Larsson, 2016; Manning, Penfold-Mounce, Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2017). In particular, Manning and colleagues (2017) find that "the various platforms of social media promote forms of authentic communication by blurring the public/private divide, creating 'spontaneous' and instant access to 'real life'" (p. 131).

Today, citizens reward politicians' authenticity and informality if they can explain what they do in simple terms and if the distance between them and their elected politicians is reduced (Graham, Jackson, & Broersma, 2017). Authenticity is defined as the interplay between actors' "political, public and private sphere in their social networking" (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2016, p. 415). Recent studies show that politicians' private lives have become an important ingredient in the social media strategies of different political actors (Metz et al., 2020; Peeters et al., 2023). Moreover, some studies reveal that cues from politicians' private lives can increase the engagement of users on social media (Metz et al., 2020; Peeters et al., 2023).

Thus, the following hypotheses on personalization and privatization are proposed:

H1a: *Posts with a personalizing function collect more interactions than posts with politicizing and mobilizing functions.*

H1b: *Posts with private life in focus and/or the presence of family members in the photos have a positive impact on the level of interactions.*

Furthermore, as one of the main indicators of personalization is the visibility of politicians in media reports (Holtz-Bacha, 2004), or in this case, in the photos of Facebook posts, I expect that a leader's photo increases the number of interactions regardless of the focus of the post:

H1c: *Obama/Cameron featuring in the photo of a post positively impacts the number of interactions.*

Popularization, Emotionalization, and Humanization

The idea of "popularization of politics" is also linked to the concepts of personalization and privatization. The assumption is that "by using the styles and platforms associated with popular culture" politics will become popular; that is, large sections of the population will engage in politics (Street, 2016, p. 1196). Street (1997) claims that politicians "associate themselves with popular culture and its icons, in the hope that some of the popularity will rub off" (p. 48). While a discussion of the popularization of politics and the related concept of "celebrity politics" is beyond the scope of this article, it looked at how Obama and Cameron used references to popular culture as an online communication strategy to connect with their followers. It is assumed that celebrity endorsements may, for instance, encourage fans of a celebrity to vote for an endorsed candidate.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H2:   *The presence of popular cues and/or celebrities in the photo increases the number of interactions.*

Another established communication strategy includes emotionalization. Recently, the literature about the role of emotionalization in political communication on social media has mushroomed. Berger and Milkman (2012) analyzed *New York Times* articles published over a three-month period to test how emotions shape the virality of online content. The results indicate that positive content is more viral than negative and that emotional stories achieved greater virality.

Moreover, recent studies find that the emotional tone of posts results in more audience engagement on Facebook (Bene, 2017; Bene et al., 2022; Heiss et al., 2019; Jost, 2023). Jost (2023) reports that the presence of emotional appeals, as well as politicians' incorporation of visual features, increased the number of user interactions on Facebook. In the context of social media, research indicates that negativity and emotionality trigger users' interactions on political actors' and political parties' Facebook pages (e.g., Bene, 2017; Bene et al., 2022). Thus, the following hypothesis is considered:

H3:   *Emotional appeals in the posts increase the levels of interaction on Facebook.*

Another technique being used to get closer to ordinary people is humanization. Holtz-Bacha (2004) defined humanization as a "classic image strategy which makes politicians appear more personable, more like the layperson, and thus seemingly close and familiar to voters" (p. 49). As humanization refers to the efforts of political actors to appear to be "one of us," the assumption is that ordinary people will often feature in politicians' communication and that political actors will call on them to engage in different actions. Although there are many other ways of examining the humanization technique (see Grbeša, 2010; Holtz-Bacha, 2004), this article concentrates on only two indicators of humanization, and proposes the following:

H4a: Calls to action in Facebook posts increase the number of interactions.

H4b: Ordinary citizens featuring in photos of posts positively affect the number of interactions.

Lastly, as posts are published both during routine and election periods, this study also examines if there is a difference in engagement depending on elections. Although some previous studies suggest that "for the most part citizens do not show a different engagement behavior with Facebook posts of politicians between routine and elections periods" (Peeters et al., 2023, p. 11), it will be assumed that election years have a significantly positive effect on the number of interactions. Thus, this study differentiates between election and nonelection years.

H5:   For Obama and Cameron, the number of interactions will be higher during election years.

Data and Methodology

Sample

The sample contained all available posts from Barack Obama's Facebook page (2008–2016), numbering 2,804 posts, and 1,317 posts from David Cameron's Facebook page (2013–2016). The time span includes Obama's two presidential terms in office and campaign periods. With Cameron, the analysis covers not only the period when he was in power but also when he ran for his second term as prime minister in 2015. Cameron was in power since 2010 but opened his official Facebook page in 2013. Posts were scraped in Python. For each of the posts, the number of likes, comments, and shares was also extracted.

Method

First, quantitative content analysis was used to examine the posts and derive descriptive statistics to summarize the data. Content analysis is predominantly based on counting and measuring quantities of items while at the same time giving considerable thought to "'kinds,' 'qualities,' and 'distinctions' in the text before any quantification takes place" (Bauer, 2000, p. 132). Second, negative binomial regression analysis was deployed to test the proposed hypotheses and to answer SRQ1. This method is suited for analyzing the dependent variables (shares, likes, comments). Given their over-dispersed distribution, they are considered count variables. Negative binomial regression enables the simultaneous analysis of the impact of multiple independent variables on a continuous dependent variable (Petz, Ivanec, & Kolesarić, 2012). In sum, this statistical method is used to identify significant relationships among cues communicated in Obama's and Cameron's posts, which served as independent variables, while the numbers of citizens' likes, comments, and shares were constructed as dependent variables.

Coding Scheme

The coding sheet was inspired by Grbeša (2010), Kaid and Johnston (2001), Wattenberg (1991), and Wilke and Reinemann (2001). It contained 10 categories and 36 values. The Facebook posts were manually coded by two independent coders. For the reliability test, they coded a random sample of 300 posts from Obama's and Cameron's Facebook posts (200 posts for Obama and 100 for Cameron). The intercoder reliability test was conducted using the Holsti (1969) method of agreement. The results display an average reliability score of 0.86 with a variance in reliability across categories ranging from 0.72 to 1.00. The variable that tested for the presence of emotional appeals had the lowest score, hence this category had to be refined and coded again. After initially scoring 0.64, the repeated coding process yielded an agreement of 0.72.

The first set of variables in the coding scheme concerns the overall focus of the Facebook post. The overall focus of the post is supposed to tell how often politicians focused on political topics and campaigning in their Facebook communication and how often their personal (private and political) profile was in focus. The effect of eight indicators is tested to discern what aspects were in prime focus. The main variables of interest were: The presence of issues (statements or comments on party's/candidate's positions on policy issues; preferences on issues; problems of public concern); political profile (focus on political actors' political qualities or characteristics, such as their integrity, charisma, reliability, competence; Wattenberg, 1991); private profile (focus on candidates' private features or private lives, such as their hobbies, memories, and details from childhood, the TV shows they watch, the music they listen to, their favorite football team, books, music, as well as their family life; see Grbeša, 2010; Langer, 2010; and campaigning; activities related to campaigning, such as donor dinners, meetings with supporters, testimonials, etc.). Posts were also coded for specific policy issues in focus (Table 1).

Table 1. Systematic Description of Categories in the Content Analysis.

Concepts	Operationalization (Indicators)
Personalization versus politicization (Image vs. issues)	Overall focus of the post (Values: Electoral process; issues; political profile; private profile; rebuttal and controversies; announcement; campaigning and others) Main issue in focus (Values: Environmental issues, immigration policy, economy, minority rights, health policy, religion and education, criminal justice system, Brexit, and security issues) Presence of Obama/Cameron in the photos (visibility) (yes/no)
Mobilization	Call to action (yes/no)
Humanization	Presence of ordinary people in the photos (yes/no)
Privatization	References to private life (yes/no)
	Presence of family members in the photos (yes/no)
Emotionalization	Presence of emotional appeals (yes/no)
Popularization and celebrity endorsement	References to popular culture (yes/no)
	Presence of celebrities in photos (yes/no)

Next, visibility as a general indicator of personalization was operationalized by looking at Obama's and Cameron's presence in posts featuring photos. Presence of family members in photos was also chosen as an indicator of privatization. To examine popularization as one aspect of privatization, the posts were coded for references to popular culture and the presence of celebrities in the posted photos. Emotionalization denotes instances in which politicians rely on emotional appeals in posts to evoke emotions in their audience (Bil-Jaruzelska & Monzer, 2022). Humanization was assessed depending on the appearance of ordinary citizens in the posts, which reflects the efforts of politicians to appear approachable and in touch with ordinary people.

Mobilization was measured through the presence of calls to action in the posts, which refer to how often citizens are invited to engage in certain online actions—signing petitions, sharing, or commenting on something, participating in discussions, voting in different polls—or in offline activities, donating money, volunteering, voting, among other things. To control for electoral cycles, a dummy variable was included that distinguished between the routine years (0) and the election years (1).

Findings

Rule of Issues—Dominance of the Politicizing Function of Social Media

This section aims to answer to what extent Barack Obama and David Cameron used the politicizing function of social media as opposed to the personalizing and mobilizing functions on their Facebook pages (RQ1). The results of the content analysis suggest that Obama used all three functions, particularly the politicizing and mobilizing functions. In his case, personalization was not as intense as expected but it was strategically planned and used for self-promotion and issue advocacy.

Results show that issues were the main (overall) focus of more than half of Obama's and Cameron's posts. Conversely, political and private profiles were rarely emphasized in their communication (Table 2).

Table 2. Overall Focus of Obama's and Cameron's Facebook Posts (%).

Overall Focus	Barack Obama (%) (N = 2,804)	David Cameron (%) (N = 1,307)
Electoral process	0.64	0.58
Issues	54.28	67.2
Political profile	4.03	1.09
Private profile	8.66	1.45
Rebuttal and controversies	4.84	3.55
Announcements	9.27	17.27
Campaigning	16.22	7.33
Other	1.93	0.22

Table 3. Issues in Obama's and Cameron's Facebook Posts (%).

Issue	Barack Obama (*n* = 1,522)	David Cameron (*n* = 878)
Economy	28.99	48.55
Environmental issue	17.41	0.54
Health policy	22.16	2.16
Minority and women's rights	8.61	3.97
Immigration policy	4.01	1.43
Religion	0.07	2.48
Education and science	3.81	2.69
Foreign affairs	3.02	6.46
Security, veterans, wars	3.88	11
Criminal justice system	6.31	/
Brexit	/	14.88
Other	1.71	3.24

A closer look at which issues (Table 3) were mainly in focus revealed that the results depend on the context and the leader's personal characteristics. Obama discussed the economy a lot in his first mandate because of the great financial crisis during that time. He also talked about security and foreign affairs, while in his second term, he focused on health care, environmental issues, and human rights. In his second term, he tried to brand himself as the president who brought change on a larger scale.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Cameron often communicated not only about the economy but also about the security and terrorist attacks happening in Europe at that time. Brexit is another topic that was often in focus on Cameron's Facebook page.

Personalization in Different Shapes

To answer the question about the character and intensity of personalization on Obama's and Cameron's Facebook pages (SRQ1), different indicators of personalization were used: Political and private profiles in prime focus, the visibility of Obama and Cameron in the posts, and the presence of family members in the photos. The results for visibility indicate that Obama and Cameron were often present in photos (Obama in 51.45% of all posts containing a photo and Cameron in 67.83%). When looking at private lives, it could be seen that both politicians were reluctant to expose their private lives to the public. Obama had family members present in photos in 7.39% of all posts, while Cameron's family appeared in only 2% of the posts (Table 4). Cameron made few references to hobbies, favorite music, and such personal matters (1%). Obama did so in less than 5%. While they were not eager to disclose their private side, both found other ways of emotionalizing their communication.

More than 60% of both leaders' posts were coded for the presence of emotional appeals. Obama often emotionalized communication using professional photos, sometimes in black-and-white technique to send a stronger message. Cameron, on the other hand, used emotion-laden words to express himself

on issues of the economy and seemed thrilled with positive results and angry with Brexit or the Labor Party issues. He often used his Facebook page to express his condolences for tragedies happening worldwide (the Paris terrorist attack, the war in Syria, floods) or domestically.

Table 4. Results of Other Analyzed Features in Obama's and Cameron's Posts (%).

	Barack Obama (N = 2,804)	**David Cameron** (N = 1,307)
Family life	6.59	2.1
Private life	4.85	0.94
Family members in photos	7.39	2.02
Ordinary citizens in photos	28.62	27.15
Emotional appeals	64.29	64.51
Calls to action	48.30	23.75
Popular culture	2.82	6.53
Celebrities in photos	1.6	2.03

Furthermore, the article aimed to uncover how often both leaders used references to popular culture and how often celebrities appeared in their photos. Surprisingly, the findings reveal that popular culture was rarely mentioned in both cases (Table 4). Celebrities appeared in less than 2% of all posts. Even when they were present, it was to promote certain issues—Brexit in the United Kingdom or environmental issues in the United States.

Cameron used his page as a single-issue propaganda tool. His focus was the economy. He used Facebook as if it was Twitter, often communicating without photos, with short messages that looked more like tweets. He used the mobilizing function of social media only to some extent. For instance, 23% of his posts contained some sort of call to action, while in Obama's case it was nearly 50%. Obama invited citizens to off- and online actions connected to campaigning for different issues. The findings for Cameron indicate that he was less interested in using Facebook for interactions with citizens. The findings for Obama are as expected because the strategy of his page was to develop a movement, which is why diverse types of calls to action were often used—from online petitions and fundraisers to different invitations to participate in Organizing for Action's (OFA) activities across the country. Interestingly, when one looks at the photos with ordinary citizens, the results for Obama and Cameron are almost the same: 28.62% and 27.15%, respectively. Also, ordinary citizens appeared on Obama's Facebook mostly in the role of supporters who were campaigning for him and for the issues that he advocated for. In Cameron's case, ordinary people were mostly presented as working people whose political attitudes could not be determined.

Personalization on Cameron's Facebook was primarily used to present him as a worker who was focused on the economy. In this context, he often appeared wearing yellow vests on different construction sites. He rarely appeared with his family members, and he was not very eager to disclose other aspects of his private life. Obama used personalization for self-promotion; Cameron used it for issue promotion. The explanation for different ways of using personalization could be pinned down to

the differences between the two political cultures (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). While for British politicians it is important to display their rhetorical skills and keen intelligence, U.S. politicians need to demonstrate that they share voters' sentiments on important issues (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). The literature also finds that in the highly personalized environment of the U.S. political system, it is normal for politicians to publicly unveil their private life and to appear with family members in private settings (Holtz-Bacha, 2004; McAllister, 2015). This article shows that Obama used Facebook in the first place to communicate about policy issues and to put certain topics on the agenda, while his political and private profiles rarely took center stage. This is surprising, given the initial assumption that he would be eager to communicate about his private life on Facebook to a greater extent and that he would do so in a more relaxed and "friendly" way. Curiously, his Facebook page retained an official look not only in terms of the topics and issues that he communicated but also in terms of strategies of issue presentation.

Shades of Privatization

Although privatization was rarely present on their Facebook pages, three levels of privatization can be recognized: Low, medium, and high. The low level of privatization refers to the formal appearance of family members in a political setting. This level of privatization was present in both cases. The medium level of privatization occurs when political actors use references to their private life (hobbies, childhood, education, habits) or popular culture. The third level of privatization occurs when politicians mention a family member in an informal context, when they share intimate moments with their family, show tactility toward family members (hugging, holding hands, kissing), and display affection publicly. This type of privatization was registered mainly in Obama's case, and on very few occasions on Cameron's page, such as when he would kiss his wife or carry his daughter.

Drivers and Killers of Citizens' Engagement on Facebook

This section aims to answer RQ2. It looks at the character and intensity of personalization on the leaders' Facebook pages. The focus is on whether different communication cues in Obama's and Cameron's Facebook pages encouraged or discouraged Facebook users to like, comment on, or share content in posts. Negative binomial regression models were run to answer this question (Table 5).

In these models, the variables were selected based on the total number of posts in which they appeared and their statistical contribution in explaining the variance on the dependent variables (likes, comments, shares). Summative findings from the regression models for Obama and Cameron are displayed in Table 6. Only those variables that had a significantly positive or negative effect on citizens' engagement were included in the table.[3]

The first part of Table 5 shows issue-/politics-related content in the posts. In general, one can observe that, in both cases, issues communicated in posts discouraged citizens to like, comment on, or

---

[3] If, for instance, some variable had a positive effect on all aspects of interactions (number of likes, comments, and shares), it was marked with three pluses in the table. If it had a negative effect on, for instance, only the number of likes, it received one minus.

share posts. In Obama's case, only the issue of minority rights had a positive effect on the number of interactions. In Cameron's posts, issues that focused on Brexit had a positive effect.

Table 5. Fixed Effects in Negative Binomial Regressions on the Number of Shares, Likes, and Comments for Obama and Cameron.

	Barack Obama			David Cameron		
	Shares	Likes	Comments	Shares	Likes	Comments
	B (*SE*)	B (*SE*)	B (*SE*)	B (*SE*)	B (*SE*)	B (*SE*)
Politicizing function						
Election year	**0.522***[***]	**0.316***[***]	**0.270***[***]	**0.445***[***]	**0.271***[***]	**0.206***[***]
	(0.036)	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.022)	(0.050)
Campaign	**−0.517***[***]	**−0.427***[***]	**−0.293***[***]	−0.047	−0.005	0.002
	(0.045)	(0.035)	(0.039)	(0.036)	(0.026)	(0.059)
Issues	**−0.211***[*]	**−0.383***[***]	0.040	**−0.106***[**]	**−0.109***[***]	**−0.047**
	(0.097)	(0.077)	(0.085)	(0.039)	(0.028)	(0.062)
Environment	0.020	**0.188***[*]	**−0.238***[*]	—	—	—
	(0.118)	(0.094)	(0.104)			
Minority rights	**0.698***[***]	**0.294***[*]	0.029	—	—	—
	(0.168)	(0.133)	(0.148)			
Brexit				**0.872***[***]	**0.404***[***]	**0.993***[***]
				(0.108)	(0.077)	(0.173)
Mobilizing function						
Action call	**0.139***[*]	0.084	**0.323***[***]	**0.097***[**]	**−0.124***[***]	**−0.227***[***]
	(0.071)	(0.056)	(0.062)	(0.035)	(0.025)	(0.056)
Citizens in photos	**−0.297***[***]	**−0.120***[***]	**−0.135***[***]	—	—	—
	(0.035)	(0.027)	(0.030)			
Personalizing function						
Political profile	**−0.105***[**]	**−0.094***[***]	**−0.064***[*]	**0.142***[***]	**0.066***[**]	0.045
	(0.036)	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.023)	(0.051)
Private profile	−0.013	**0.102***[**]	**0.146***[***]	**0.076***[*]	**0.093***[***]	0.081
	(0.042)	(0.033)	(0.036)	(0.031)	(0.022)	(0.051)
Family in photos	**0.136***[***]	**0.158***[***]	**0.120***[***]	—	—	—
	(0.038)	(0.030)	(0.033)			
Photo featuring (ref = no photo)						
Obama/Cameron	**0.135***[***]	**0.223***[***]	**0.157***[***]	0.059	−0.058	−0.139
	(0.036)	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.070)	(0.050)	(0.112)
Others	—	—	—	**−0.279***[*]	**−0.499***[***]	−0.285
				(0.095)	(0.068)	(0.153)
Popularization						
Celebrities in photos	−0.112	**−0.068***[*]	−0.044	—	—	—
	(0.043)	(0.034)	(0.038)			
Pop culture	−0.055	0.015	0.004	**−0.122***[***]	0.025	−0.008

	(0.047)	(0.034)	(0.038)	(0.033)	(0.023)	(0.052)
Emotionalization						
Emotions	**0.550***	**0.515***	**0.383***	**0.223***	**0.129***	−0.067
	(0.035)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.023)	(0.051)
Intercept	8.410***	10.909***	8.233***	6.191***	8.343***	6.551***
D_f	2552	2552	2552	1315	1310	1314
Pseudo R^2	0.182	0.258	0.143	0.190	0.215	0.042
Akaike Information Criterion (AIC)	45,522.3	60,472.3	46,164.8	19,075.4	24,575.3	18,554.5

Note. $^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.

With regard to the proposed hypotheses, H1a, which expects posts with personalizing function to collect more interactions, was to some extent confirmed. Posts with political and private profiles, with the presence of family members and in Obama's case his photo, attracted more interactions than posts with issues, campaigning, and calls to action. However, in both cases, some issues have high engagement potential (minority rights in the United States and Brexit in the United Kingdom). Also, H1b, which predicts that private life in focus and/or the presence of family members in the photos will increase the number of interactions, was partially confirmed. Family members in photos in Obama's case had a significantly positive effect on numbers of likes, comments, and shares. However, when his private profile was in focus, it had a positive effect only on the number of comments and likes. Many comments could be explained by the fact that users would simply congratulate him on his birthday, Father's Day, family holidays, and similar occasions. In Cameron's case, only private life in focus had a positive effect on the number of likes, while family members in photos was not included in the model as it did not show any significance for the model. As already explained in the first part of the analysis, private life and family members were rarely present in both leaders' communication strategies.

Table 6. Comparison of Statistically Significant Effects of Variables on Political Leaders' Interactions on Facebook.

		Observed Effects	
Variables	**Predicted Effects**	**Obama**	**Cameron**
Politicizing function			
Issues in overall focus	−	− −	− − −
Brexit	−	×	+ + +
Environment	+	+ +	×
Minority rights	+	+ + +	×
Campaigning	+	− − −	/
Personalizing function			
Leader in photos	+	+ + +	/
Political profile in focus	+	− − −	+ +
Private life in focus	+	**++**	**+ +**
Family members in photos	+	**+ + +**	×

Emotionalization			
Emotional appeals	+	**+ + +**	**+ +**
Popular culture			
Popular culture	+	−	−
Celebrity in photos	+	−	×
Mobilizing function			
Call to action	+	++	+ − −
Ordinary citizens in photo	+	− − −	×
Election years	+	+++	+++

Note. / not statistically significant; × not applicable; + positive effect on one interaction type (likes, comments, or shares); − negative effect on one interaction type.

Finally, when looking at the presence of Obama and Cameron in the photos, the analysis shows that Obama was given more likes, comments, and shares by users for photos in which he appeared. Quite often, Obama had photos in his posts and often appeared in these photos. Cameron's presence in photos did not have any positive effect on the number of likes, comments, or shares. However, it had a negative effect on the number of likes when others were featured in the photos. The explanation might be that in almost half of all the posts, he did not have a photo, and when there was a photo it usually was not "Instagram likeable."[4] Furthermore, H1c, which expects the presence of Obama/Cameron in a post's photo to yield increases in the number of interactions, was confirmed only in Obama's case. As said, Cameron rarely appeared in photos, and many of his posts did not have a photo.

Furthermore, the presence of celebrities in the photos had either no effect or a negative effect. For instance, references to popular culture in Cameron's case had a negative effect, which could be explained by the fact that celebrities and references to popular culture appeared mostly in relation to Brexit. This result means that H2, which expects that presence of popular cues and/or celebrities in the photos to have a positive impact on the number of interactions, was rejected. However, references to popular culture and celebrities appeared rarely in both leaders' posts, suggesting that it was not a deliberate strategy designed for social media. This is surprising and worthy of further research. If politicians are so eager to mobilize celebrities in their campaigns, why do they not use this strategy on Facebook?

Hypothesis 3, the expectation that emotional appeals in posts would positively affect the number of interactions was confirmed in both cases. This finding corroborates existing studies that looked at emotions and their links to users' interactions.

Interestingly, the presence of ordinary people in photos, defined as humanization but also as one of the mobilizing factors, had a negative effect on citizens' engagement in Obama's case. In Cameron's case, this variable was not included in the model as it did not add explanatory power. As already discussed, this

---

[4] "Instagram likeable" is an expression that has been used recently to describe the content on Instagram that will most probably get numerous likes. Online tools are used in many of these posts to make the visuals look very attractive.

is, to some extent, a surprising finding, because a social media success story is grounded in ordinary people. Yet it tells us that citizens, when they visit a politician's page, wish to see them and their family members, and not ordinary people like themselves. Also, most of the photos featuring ordinary people looked like amateur photos, whereas people prefer nice, professional, and high-quality photos, retouched and stylized photos, and photos that look "Instagram likeable." Moreover, the presence of a "call to action" had a mixed effect on the number of interactions, and thus H4a could neither be confirmed nor rejected. Calls to action had a positive impact only in Obama's case and only on the number of comments. In Cameron's case, they even had a negative effect on the likes and comments. Also, the expectation that ordinary citizens in the posts' photos would positively impact the number of interactions was rejected (H4b). Moreover, the results point to a highly significant and negative effect in Obama's case, while in Cameron's case, the variable was not relevant to the model.

Finally, H5, which claimed that the number of interactions would be higher during election years was confirmed. To sum up, emotions and cues from family and private lives may work toward encouraging users' engagement, while the presence of ordinary people in posts discourages users to like, comment on, and share posts.

Discussion and Conclusion

By combining theoretical, descriptive, and empirical tools, this study revealed that Obama and Cameron primarily used the "politicizing function" of Facebook. The focus was to a lesser degree on citizens and calls to action (the "mobilizing function of social media"). Finally, the "personalizing function of social media" was the least used function in Obama's and Cameron's communication strategies.

Furthermore, when looking at the character and intensity of personalization, the findings showed that personalization was not intense, but it was present and mostly manifested through Obama's/Cameron's photos in their Facebook posts. Obama's photos left a strong impression of a world leader who cared not only about the environment and human rights but also about the prosperity of every American citizen. He was also portrayed as a family man. In contrast, Cameron mostly appeared in the role of a man who worked very hard to improve the economy and the security of British citizens. Furthermore, the analysis showed that personalization comes in different forms and that visibility is an often-used strategy, as opposed to privatization. The study also identifies different levels of privatization. The low level of privatization was used very often by both Obama and Cameron, the medium level was rarely used, while the high level of privatization was found only in the U.S. context. In other words, it may be argued that the visibility of politicians, emotionalization, and humanization through ordinary people are techniques that are commonly used on Facebook, while the usage of the high level of privatization is more context-dependent, wherein the context includes the political system, political and media culture, specific electoral contexts, and the characteristics of political actors.

Finally, the article aimed to determine which traits communicated on Obama's and Cameron's Facebook pages encouraged or discouraged users to like, comment on, and share content. The results of the negative binomial regression analysis, which combined findings of content analysis and numbers of likes, comments, and shares for each post, show that emotions and elements from the private lives of politicians

work as drivers of online engagement, while the presence of ordinary people and celebrities in the photos discourages people from liking, commenting on, and sharing posts.

This study faces several limitations. First, only two politicians were included. A bigger sample of leaders and different countries would be an asset. Second, it would be interesting to include other social media platforms and not only Facebook. Another limitation is related to the shortcomings of the programming languages for scraping. Although the sample included a remarkable amount of data, it is almost certain that some of the posts were missing.

Finally, what can be learned from these two cases, and to what extent are these findings generalizable? Although generalizations from cases that are specific, such as that of Obama, who is a globally popular political icon, are not advisable, there are several broader takeaways from this study. First, it is important to note that a communication style that is emotional, positive, constructive, grounded, emphatic, caring, and rich not only in content but also in form, which was used on Obama's Facebook page, attracted millions and millions of users. While today the popularity of populist and negative rhetoric on online platforms is increasing (Bene et al., 2022), it is crucial to look back at the still most popular social media politician[5] and analyze the strategies and tactics that helped him build not only his political career but also his brand. Although present-day political communication is characterized by populist rhetoric, negativity (Bene et al., 2022), authenticity, informalization, and based on gut feeling (Enli, 2017), our two cases inform us that a combination of a strategic, professionalized communication style and authenticity is the best formula to gain popularity, and more importantly to assure that people hear the message. This means that people want to see a bit of "glamour" of politicians' lives, but at the same time, they also want to see their representatives as ordinary people in "uncontrolled" situations. The popularity of Obama's posts that had professionally retouched and filtered photos with his portrait in contrast to amateur photos supports this idea. Also, Cameron's case shows how important it is to adapt online communication to the characteristics of a certain platform. As already mentioned, one of the reasons why Cameron was not that popular on Facebook was because for most of the time he used it as if it were Twitter.

Future research should focus on the interaction between emotional appeals and other features in the posts, as well as on the effects of "professionalized" versus "un-professionalized" posts on users' engagement.

References

Adam, S., & Maier, M. (2010). Personalisation of politics: A critical review and agenda for future research. In C. T. Salmon (Ed.), *Communication yearbook 34* (pp. 212–257). Oxford, UK: Routledge.

Anderson, S. (2019). Irony in Charleston: Barack Obama's eulogy for Clementa C. Pinckney, June 26, 2015. *Communication Quarterly, 67*(4), 405–423. doi:10.1080/01463373.2019.1605397

---

[5] Obama currently has more than 55 million followers on his Facebook page, compared to Donald Trump's 34 million.

Bauer, M. W. (2000). Classical content analysis: A review. In M. W. Bauer, & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound* (pp. 131–152). London, UK: SAGE.

Bene, M. (2017). Go viral on the Facebook! Interactions between candidates and followers on Facebook during the Hungarian general election campaign of 2014. *Information, Communication & Society, 20*(4), 513–529. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2016.1198411

Bene, M., Ceron, A., Fenoll, V., Haßler, J., Kruschinski, S., Larsson, A. O., . . . Wurst, A.-K. (2022). Keep them engaged! Investigating the effects of self-centered social media communication style on user engagement in 12 European countries. *Political Communication, 39*(4), 429–453. doi:10.1080/10584609.2022.2042435

Berger, J., & Milkman, K. L. (2012). What makes online content viral*? Journal of Marketing Research, 49*(2), 192–205. doi:10.1509/jmr.10.0353

Bil-Jaruzelska, A., & Monzer, C. (2022). All about feelings? Emotional appeals as drivers of user engagement with Facebook posts. *Politics and Governance, 10*(1), 172–184. doi:10.17645/pag.v10i1.4758

Bronstein, J. (2013). Like me! Analyzing the 2012 presidential candidates' Facebook pages. *Online Information Review, 37*(2), 173–192. doi:10.1108/OIR-01-2013-0002

Cogburn, D. L., & Espinoza-Vasquez, F. K. (2011). From networked nominee to networked nation: Examining the impact of Web 2.0 and social media on political participation and civic engagement in the 2008 Obama campaign. *Journal of Political Marketing, 10*(1–2), 189–213. doi:10.1080/15377857.2011.540224

DeVinney, D. J. (2021). Legitimizing the first Black presidency: Cinematic history and rhetorical vision in Barack Obama's 2008 victory speech. *Southern Communication Journal, 86*(1), 5–16. doi:10.1080/1041794X.2020.1843700

Ekman, M., & Widholm, A. (2014). Twitter and the celebritisation of politics. *Celebrity Studies, 5*(4), 518–520. doi:10.1080/19392397.2014.981038

Enli, G. (2017). Twitter as arena for the authentic outsider: Exploring the social media campaigns of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 US presidential election. *European Journal of Communication, 32*(1), 50–61. doi:10.1177/0267323116682802

Enli, G. S., & Skogerbø, E. (2013). Personalized campaigns in party-centred politics: Twitter and Facebook as arenas for political communication. *Information, Communication & Society, 16*(5), 757–774. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2013.782330

Gerbaudo, P., Marogna, F., & Alzetta, C. (2019). When "positive posting" attracts voters: User engagement and emotions in the 2017 UK election campaign on Facebook. *Social Media + Society, 5*(4), 1–11. doi:10.1177/2056305119881695

Gerodimos, R., & Justinussen, J. (2015). Obama's 2012 Facebook campaign: Political communication in the age of the like button*. Journal of Information Technology and Politics, 12*(2), 113–132. doi:10.1080/19331681.2014.982266

Graham, T., Broersma, M. J., Hazelhoff, K., & van 't Haar, G. (2013). Between broadcasting political messages and interacting with voters. *Information, Communication & Society, 16*(5), 692–716. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2013.785581

Graham, T., Jackson, D., & Broersma, M. J. (2017, May). *Exposing themselves? The personalization of tweeting behavior during the 2012 Dutch general election campaign*. Paper presented at the 67th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, San Diego, CA.

Grbeša, M. (2010). Privatisation of politics in Croatia: Analysis of the 2003 and 2007 parliamentary elections. *Media Studies, 16*(2), 57–79.

Heiss, R., Schmuck, D., & Matthes, J. (2019). What drives interaction in political actors' Facebook posts? Profile and content predictors of user engagement and political actors' reactions. *Information, Communication & Society, 22*(10), 1497–1513. doi:1080/1369118X.2018.1445273

Holsti, O. R. (1969). *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Holtz-Bacha, C. (2004). Germany: How the private life of politicians got into the media. *Parliamentary Affairs, 57*(1), 41–52. doi:10.1093/pa/gsh004

Holtz-Bacha, C., Langer, A. I., & Merkle, S. (2014). The personalisation of politics in comparative perspective: Campaign coverage in Germany and the United Kingdom. *European Journal of Communication, 29*(2), 153–170. doi:10.1177/0267323113516727

Jost, P. (2023). How politicians adapt to new media logic. A longitudinal perspective on accommodation to user-engagement on Facebook. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 20*(2), 184–197. doi:10.1080/19331681.2022.2076271

Kaid, L. L., & Johnston, A. (2001). *Videostyle in presidential campaigns*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Katz, J. E., Barris, M., & Jain, A. (2013). *The social media president: Barack Obama and the politics of digital engagement*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kreiss, D. (2014). Seizing the moment: The presidential campaigns' use of Twitter during the 2012 electoral cycle. *New Media and Society, 18*(8), 1473–1490. doi:10.1177/1461444814562445

Lalancette, M., & Raynauld, V. (2019). The power of political image: Justin Trudeau, Instagram, and celebrity politics. *American Behavioural Scientist, 63*(7), 888–924. doi:10.1177/0002764217744838

Langer, A. I. (2010). The politicization of private persona: Exceptional leaders or the new rule? The case of the United Kingdom and the Blair effect. *International Journal of Press-Politics, 15*(1), 60–76. doi:10.1177/1940161209351003

Larsson, A. O. (2016). Online, all the time? A quantitative assessment of the permanent campaign on Facebook. *New Media & Society, 18*(2), 274–292. doi:10.1177/1461444814538798

Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. A. (2016). Performing for the young networked citizen? Celebrity politics, social networking and the political engagement of young people. *Media, Culture & Society, 38*(3), 400–419. doi:10.1177/0163443715608261

Manning, N., Penfold-Mounce, R., Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. (2017). Politicians, celebrities and social media: A case of informalisation? *Journal of Youth Studies, 20*(2), 127–144. doi:10.1080/13676261.2016.1206867

McAllister, I. (2015). The personalisation of politics in Australia. *Party Politics, 21*(3), 337–345. doi:10.1177/1354068813487111

McGregor, S. C., Lawrence, R. G., & Cardona, A. (2017). Personalization, gender, and social media: Gubernatorial candidates' social media strategies. *Information, Communication & Society, 20*(2), 264–283. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2016.1167228

Metz, M., Kruikemeier, S., & Lecheler, S. (2020). Personalization of politics on Facebook: Examining the content and effects of professional, emotional and private self-personalization. *Information, Communication & Society, 23*(10), 1481–1498. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2019.1581244

Peeters, J., Opgenhaffen, M., Kreutz, T., & Van Aelst, P. (2023). Understanding the online relationship between politicians and citizens. A study on the user engagement of politicians' Facebook posts in election and routine periods. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 20*(1), 44–59. doi:10.1080/19331681.2022.2029791

Petz, B., Ivanec, D., & Kolesarić, V. (2012). *Petzova statistika: Osnovne statističke metode za nematematičare* [Petz's statistics: Basic statistical methods for non-mathematicians]. Jastrebarsko, Croatia: Naklada Slap.

Rahat, G., & Kenig, O. (2018). *From party politics to personalized politics? Party change and political personalization in democracies*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Stratton, A. (2013, August 2). *Tories hire Obama campaign chief Jim Messina.* BBC. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-23551323.

Street, J. (1997). *Politics and popular culture*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Street, J. (2016). Popularization of politics. In G. Mazzoleni (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of political communication* (pp. 1196–1200). Maiden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Stromer-Galley, J. (2014). *Presidential campaigning in the Internet age*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Swanson, D. L., & Mancini, P. (Eds.). (1996). *Politics, media, and modern democracy: An international study of innovations in electoral campaigning and their consequences*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Theodoropoulou, I. (2020). Speech style as political capital: Barack Obama's Athens speech. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 15*(3), 325–339. doi:10.1080/17447143.2020.1800715

Van Aelst, P., Sheafer, T., & Stanyer, J. (2012). The personalisation of mediated political communication: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism, 13*(2), 203–220. doi:10.1177/1464884911427802

Vergeer, M., Hermans, L., & Sams, S. (2013). Online social networks and micro-blogging in political campaigning: The exploration of a new campaign tool and a new campaign style. *Party Politics, 19*(3), 477–501. doi:10.1177/1354068811407580

Vuckovic, M. (2020). *Private, popular, and political on social media: Analysis of on-line communication of Barack Obama, David Cameron, and Ivo Josipović* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Wattenberg, M. P. (1991). *The rise of candidate-centered politics: Presidential elections of the 1980s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wilke, J., & Reinemann, C. (2001). Do the candidates matter? Long-term trends of campaign coverage—A study of the German press since 1949. *European Journal of Communication, 16*(3), 291–314. doi:10.1177/0267323101016003001