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Politicians, Parties, and Government Representatives on Instagram: A Review of Research Approaches, Usage Patterns, and Effects

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Abstract

The photo and video sharing social network Instagram attracts an impressive number of users, among them political actors such as politicians, parties, and members of the government. Instagram's focus on images, which can be accompanied by lengthy captions as well as a range of other communication tools, suggests that the platform has high potential for political communication. Therefore, it is no surprise that Instagram has attracted the interest of scholars of various research areas. This article provides a systematic review of 37 studies on Instagram usage by politicians, parties, and governments. The aim is to gather substantiated knowledge while identifying research gaps. To this end, the review focuses on three key areas of Instagram research: who uses Instagram, how do they use it, and with what effect? Methodological approaches, databases, and applied theories are included to provide a comprehensive overview of research on Instagram. Based on the findings, points of departure for future research are identified.

Highlights

- Review of 37 studies addressing the questions of who uses Instagram, how they use it, and with what effect.
- Inconclusive evidence on whether Instagram is more readily adopted by established or smaller actors.
- Evidence that Instagram is mainly used to promote a positive, professional image.
- Early indications that political actors of the center-right/right post more non-political content and those of the center-left/left post more political issues.
- Preliminary evidence that both manners of usage and its' effects may be influenced by political actors' gender.
- Limited knowledge of how political actors' self-presentation on Instagram affects voters' perceptions.
- Research gaps regarding comparisons across countries, different types of actors, and election- and non-election periods.
- State of the literature at October 6, 2020 on research on Instagram use by politicians, political parties, and government representatives.

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Content

Introduction

The social network Instagram was launched in 2010 and rapidly increased in popularity with one billion active users per month today (Statista, 2020a). Instagram quickly attracted political actors such as politicians, parties, and members of the government (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Russmann et al., 2019; Towner & Muñoz, 2018). What makes Instagram unique amongst social media platforms is its focus on visuals. There is substantial evidence that visual communication matters in political communication. For instance, visuals can transport character traits and qualities of political actors (German, 2008). Moreover, images affect the perception of politicians (Boomgaarden et al., 2016; von Sikorski & Ludwig, 2018), e.g., perceived competence (Todorov et al., 2005), and can contribute to voting choices (Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987; Todorov et al., 2005). And not only image content can influence the impact of images on voters' perceptions of political actors, but also presentation techniques, such as shot size or camera angle (Messaris, 1997; Graber, 2001). Therefore, images have the potential to evoke effects on several levels (Page & Duffy, 2018).

Furthermore, several features of Instagram suggest that the medium is well suited for political advertising. Instagram provides the opportunity for a direct target group approach (Parmelee & Roman, 2019) and is popular among young users (Statista, 2020b), both being main motivations of political actors' social media usage (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016). Moreover, the potential to combine images with lengthy captions and the multitude of tools, such as comments, life videos, stories , and reels , make Instagram – in theory – suitable for self-presentation, dissemination of political issues, and to interact with citizens. Thus, the combination of an attractive user demographic and multimodal environment offers great potential for political communication.

It is not surprising that political Instagram usage has attracted the interest of scholars from a variety of research areas, such as Communication (Larsson, 2017a), Political Science (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017), and Linguistics (Dobkiewicz, 2019). They approach the platform from various angles, for example, assessing the self-presentation of politicians (Muñoz & Towner, 2017), two-way communication between parties and users (Russmann & Svensson, 2017), or agenda-setting effects (Towner & Muñoz, 2018). Some studies explore Instagram through qualitative research designs (Abidin, 2017), while others analyze digital trace data (Larsson, 2017b). At the actor level, we find both single case studies on politicians (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017) as well as comparisons of parties in election campaigns from multiple countries (Russmann et al., 2019). Hence, research in this field is very diverse.

At this early but crucial stage of political communication research on Instagram, assessing the state of the literature can help to gather substantiated knowledge while identifying white spots on the map (Webster & Watson, 2002). This review contributes to a systematic analysis of the political usage of Instagram and prepares the ground for comparable and evidence-based research (Jungherr, 2016). To this end, it provides a review of 37 empirical studies on the usage of Instagram by politicians, parties, and governments. Specifically, the review focuses on the actors involved in the political decision-making process: political institutions such as parties, ministries, and governments, but also individual politicians such as members of parliament, candidates, or heads of government. This focus on a specific group of political actors, rather than the broad spectrum of political Instagram usage, allows for an in-depth analysis of the existing research which can serve as a foundation for future work. Within this scope, the review brings together research on three key areas of Instagram research: who uses Instagram, how do they use it, and with what effect? To provide a comprehensive overview of research on Instagram, methodological approaches, databases, and theories applied are also discussed.

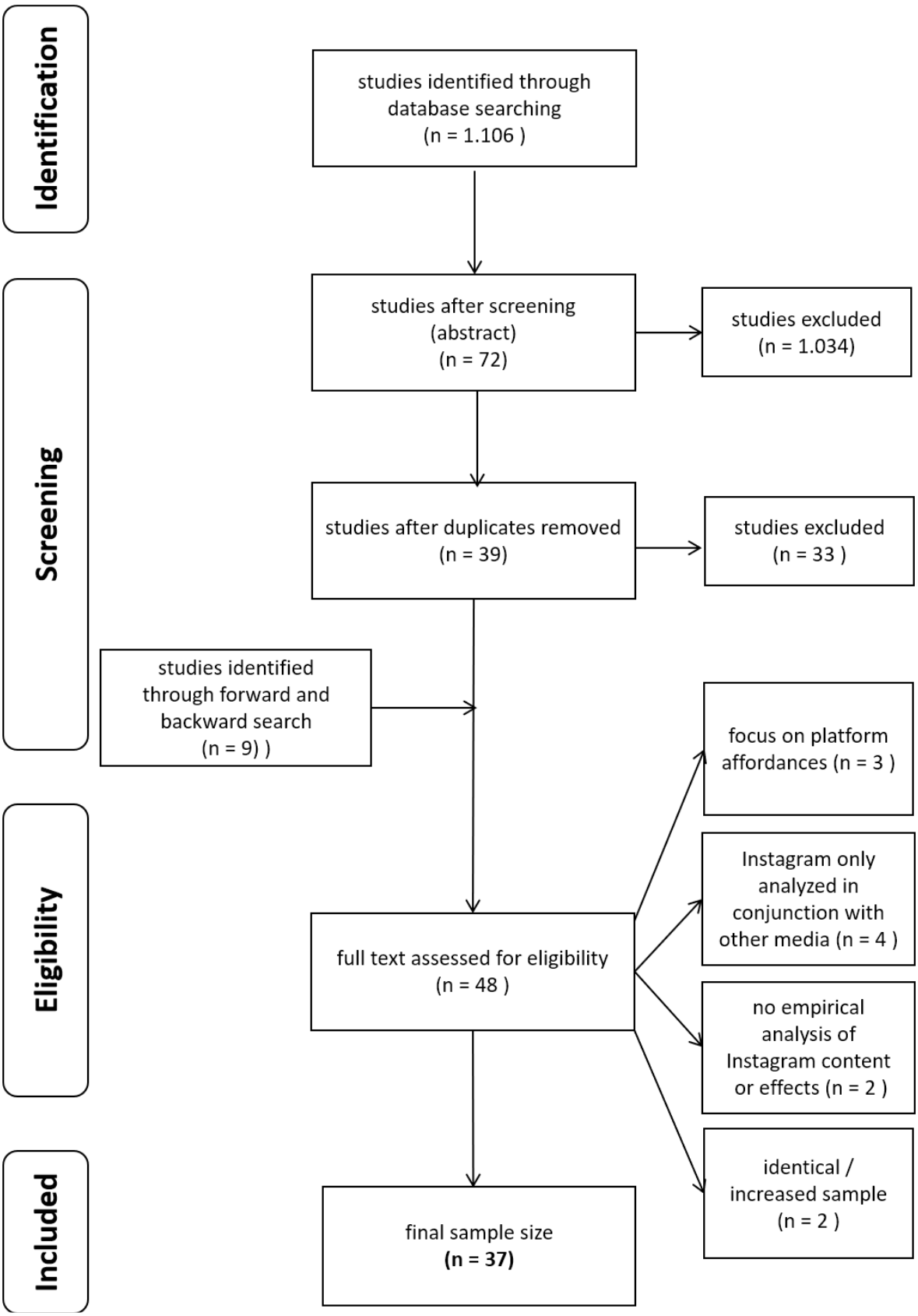
Scope

The increasing popularity of Instagram as a channel of political communication demands a thorough discussion which is summarized best with the aforementioned questions. They provide the framework against which the studies will be reviewed and are explained in the following sections.

User Analysis

First, the literature is to be investigated to elaborate on the first question. The objective is not to compare the databases of individual studies, as this cannot provide a representative picture of which political actors use Instagram or not. Rather, the aim is to bring together studies that systematically assess which political actors tend to adopt Instagram or compare the

Figure 1. *Float Chart of Literature Search* (back to text)



level of activity of actors on the platform. Among other things, this may shed light on a debate in academia as to whether social media are better suited for established or less established political actors. Some argue that social media are low-budget and enable small parties to reach a wide audience (Klinger, 2013; Larsson, 2017b; Vergeer et al., 2011). Others assume that social media do not have a balancing effect in that they help small parties or less established actors to gain attention. Instead, they would rather reinforce existing power relations through an increase in the degree of professionalism and cost over time which can only be met by established actors (Larsson, 2017b; Margolis & Resnick, 2000). Knowing who is using Instagram and what influence political role or socio-demographic factors have in this respect could help to resolve these uncertainties.

Manners of Usage

Next comes the questions of how political actors use the medium. In theory, the platform could be used in various ways by implementing a variety of platform features. For example, Instagram seems to be a good platform to present politicians or parties to the public because it is aimed at image-based self-portrayal and is known for users presenting a very positive image of themselves (Hong et al., 2020). Moreover, Instagram offers possibilities for users to engage in two-way interactions with others, for example, by replying to comments (Russmann & Svensson, 2017). And Instagram is not reduced to images, but allows users to add long captions to their posts. Thus, political actors could resort to Instagram to communicate about political issues. Given these multiple possibilities, which have certainly not been exhaustively enumerated here, this category aims to gather insights into the user behavior of political actors on Instagram, discovering patterns, and identifying research gaps.

Effects

The final research question relates to how successful communication on Instagram is, i.e., what effect it has on users, potential voters, or traditional media. Instagram is distinct from other media because of its visual focus (Borges-Rey, 2015). Against the background of findings on the effects of visual communication, Instagram seems to hold vast potential for disseminating messages that may influence the perception of political actors. For instance, images can transport character traits that are difficult to convey through text (German, 2008) and affect candidate assessment (Boomgaarden et al., 2016; Todorov et al., 2005), formation of a politicians' image, and voting behavior (Barrett & Barrington, 2005; Rosenberg et al., 1986; Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987). Moreover, the possibility of adding captions to images to spread a message leads researchers to suspect that political actors' communication on Instagram may have a particularly strong effect on users (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017). Additionally, research on agenda-setting effects of political communication on social media suggests that platforms and traditional media mutually influence each other (e.g., Conway et al., 2015; Su & Borah, 2019).

Research Approaches

In order to identify research gaps, it is critical to review the research approaches used in the studies. As a multimodal platform, Instagram offers its users several posting functions: still and moving images, text, the video feature IGTV, or stories (i.e., content that is automatically deleted after 24 hours). This variety poses a challenge, as it both generates a wide range of data and requires a profound methodological repertoire that takes the particularities of visual material into account (Müller & Geise, 2015). Thus, this paper includes a review of methods applied and databases to understand which Instagram features were analyzed and how. Moreover, the interdisciplinary character of research on Instagram raises the question of which theories can be drawn on to enhance our understanding of the medium.

Method

This review discusses studies on Instagram usage by political actors, defined as politicians, parties, and members of the government. For this reason, a literature search and subsequent analysis of the studies were conducted. As the review covers a variety of studies with different methodological approaches, a qualitative synthesis was used (Moher et al., 2015). To ensure a high quality of the results, the analysis was based on the PRISMA-P guidelines, a protocol intended to facilitate the conduction of reviews and meta-analyses (Moher et al., 2015).

Literature Search and Eligibility Criteria

Studies on Instagram usage by said actors were obtained in three steps (Figure 1). First, a systematic literature search was conducted among the databases Academic Search Complete, BASE, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Google Scholar, Political Science Complete, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, OpenDissertations, SSRN, and Web of Science. These nine databases were selected to cover a broad range of journals in political and communication science as well as peer-reviewed conference proceedings, book chapters, and doctoral qualification works. The search string was specified as the key term (1) Instagram paired with terms related to political communication (politics OR politician OR candidate OR election OR campaign OR political OR policy OR government OR vote OR voter OR voters OR electorate). All databases and the corresponding search terms are displayed in Appendix. To be retrievable in the database, said terms had to appear in the abstract of the study. This resulted in n = 1,106 potential studies. Based on the abstract of the obtained studies, irrelevant literature (n = 1,034; e.g., studies on non-political actors or unsuitable types of literature such as unreviewed working papers) and duplicates (n = 33) were eliminated. This resulted in a sample of n = 39 studies. Based on the preliminary sample, both a backward and a forward search were conducted as steps two and three of the literature search. The backward search checked the reference lists of the preliminary sample. With the forward search, a cited reference search of these studies in the Web of Science (SSCI) was executed. This led to n = 9 additional studies.

Next, the n = 48 studies were examined by reading the full texts and using the following eligibility criteria: since the aim of this review is to gather empirical knowledge on how political actors use Instagram, only studies empirically analyzing Instagram content to address the questions of (a) which of the actors defined above use Instagram, (b) how they use it, and/or (c) assessing the effects of their communication were considered for analysis. Consequently, studies focusing on the structure of the platform (n = 3) or not conducting an empirical analysis or effect study (n = 2) were eliminated. Moreover, this overview focuses on the findings on Instagram. Thus, studies analyzing Instagram together with other (social) media without reporting the findings on Instagram separately (e.g., through comparisons) were excluded (n = 4). In contrast, studies were included that explored multiple media platforms, but reported findings – at least partly – in such a way that they could be unambiguously attributed to Instagram. In the case of several studies with identical samples and rather identical methodological approaches, as well as studies that increased the sample size in further publications, the study with the smaller sample (Elm et al., 2004) was excluded (n = 2). The literature search was completed on October 6, 2020 with a final sample of 37 studies.

Analysis Strategy

The analysis was conducted in several steps by the author based on the previously elaborated three top-level categories. To this end, each study was coded for each category as to whether it was analyzed, not analyzed, or if it was analyzed but the results were not reported individually for Instagram (these will not be considered further in the review.) The first category refers to the user analysis and focuses on studies that either systematically analyze which political actors maintain an Instagram-account or how actively they use it (e.g., how often they publish a post). The second category translated into the manner of usage, and therefore includes all studies analyzing how political actors use Instagram. The last category considers studies concerned with the effects of political actors' Instagram activity.

In a second step, the studies' findings were inductively grouped into sub-level categories by screening the full text and identifying common, overarching topics (Medaglia & Zheng, 2017). While no sub-level categories were identified for user analysis, manners of usage was further divided into self-presentation, political issues, mobilization, campaign information, and interaction. Studies addressing effects of political actors' Instagram usage were further divided into those dealing with effects on users and effects on media agenda. Additionally, since some of the studies compared multiple social media outlets, a category gathering results on these comparisons of Instagram to other social media platforms was included. The categories will be described in detail in the Results section of this paper.

The grouping process was mainly driven by the studies' content rather than by objectives formulated by the respective authors. For example, a study that dealt broadly with self-presentation on Instagram, while also providing insights into how politicians post content aimed at mobilizing voters, could be classified under the category mobilization without the study explicitly stating to investigate this. Deviations between

the individual studies regarding conceptual or operational definitions were, however, quite possible. For example, two different studies could cover mobilization differently, but still both be classified in the corresponding subgroup. But the differences are reported and were taken into account when comparing the findings. Moreover, if a study claimed to investigate a particular aspect but did not report it in the results, it was treated as if it had not been investigated. In addition, the risk of bias was assessed at the outcome level (Moher et al., 2015): a study's methodological approach was taken into account to determine the generalizability and comparability of the findings.

In order to be able to situate the studies' findings, it was also noted which type of actor (politician, party, or government) was analyzed, in which country and region the analysis was located, and whether a study was embedded in the context of an election campaign period or in a general period (i.e., a non-election or both election and non-election period).

Third, the studies were grouped with regard to their research approach. To this end, the research methods, the data basis (including type of actor analyzed, type of sample, and selection criteria), and the applied theoretical concepts were documented. Within these categories, the studies were again inductively grouped (Medaglia & Zheng, 2017). For example, all methods used in the studies were identified by scanning the full texts. All studies were then grouped accordingly. Since both qualitative and quantitative studies were analyzed, the application of a theory was not limited to hypothesis testing, but referred to whether a theoretical concept—and, if so, which concept—explicitly guided the analysis. As a single study might offer findings on multiple research areas or make use of several methods, it could be classified in more than one category (Medaglia & Zheng, 2017).

Inter-coder reliability was calculated for the top-level categories and the additional information on the studies. A randomly selected subsample of 10% was coded by the author and an additional trained coder. Holsti's coefficient and Krippendorff's alpha were calculated. The results were very good for all top-level categories (user analysis: Holsti's = 1.0, α = 1.0; manners of usage: Holsti's = .96, α = .94; effects: Holsti's = 1.0, α = 1.0) and study characteristics (type of actor: Holsti's = 1.0, α = 1.0; country: Holsti's = 1.0, α = 1.0; region: Holsti's = 1.0, α = 1.0).

Additionally, an intra-coder reliability test was performed by the author to ensure consistency for the inductively obtained sub-categories and research approaches. Two months after all studies were classified for the first time, the entire process was repeated. This resulted in a percentage agreement of 100% (Holsti's = 1.0) for each category.

Results

A total of N = 37 studies, published between 2015 and 2020, analyzed Instagram usage by political actors in Europe (n = 15), South East Asia (n = 9), North America (n = 8), North Caucasus (n = 2), the Middle East (n = 1), South America (n = 1), and Europe and North America simultaneously (n = 1; Table 1). All but two studies focused on one country only.

Findings on Instagram Usage by Political Actors

User Analysis

Determinants of Instagram usage among political actors are not very well understood. 18 studies reported on which political actors use Instagram or compared their Instagram activity (A. F. Azmi & Budi, 2018; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Ghazali et al., 2019; Grusell & Nord, 2020; Larsson, 2017a, b, 2020; Ludwig, 2017; Mohamed, 2019; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Nespoli, 2019; O'Connell, 2018, 2020; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019; Russmann & Svensson, 2017; Svensson et al., 2020; Towner & Muñoz, 2018; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). One group of studies reported on the proportion of certain political actors who have an Instagram account (A. F. Azmi & Budi, 2018; Farkas & Bene, 2020; O'Connell, 2018). They found that in 2016, 79% of Indonesian Ministries (A. F. Azmi & Budi, 2018) and in 2017, 79% of the members of U.S. congress had an account (O'Connell, 2018; see also: O'Connel, 2020). In Hungary, by contrast, the adoption of Instagram during the general election campaign in 2018 among politicians was considerably lower (10%) than that of Facebook (82%) (Farkas & Bene, 2020).

Another group of studies provided insights into user behavior by comparing the Instagram activity of multiple actors, for example, the numbers of post published in a certain period (Grusell & Nord, 2020; Larsson, 2017a, 2020; Ludwig, 2017; Mohamed, 2019; Muñoz and Towner, 2017; Nespoli, 2019; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019; Russmann

& Svensson, 2017; Svensson et al., 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019;). Others analyzed how present specific types of actors are on the platform (Larsson, 2017b). Their results are partly contradictory: On the one hand, Instagram is popular among established actors. For example, when comparing social media platforms, Larsson (2017b) found that Instagram is characterized by a large presence of relatively established Norwegian parties, whereas Twitter is more actively used by citizens and members of smaller parties. On the other hand, Turnbull-Dugarte (2019) found that the new parties Ciudadanos and Podemos were the most active on Instagram among the four main political parties in the 2015 and 2016 Spanish election campaigns. This was true both in terms of the number of posts and followers. The author concluded that this may be because new parties resort to social media as they lack access to traditional media outlets. Moreover, these parties strongly targeted young people, which are more active on Instagram. Similarly, Russmann & Svensson (2017) found that a Swedish party not represented in parliament was considerably more active than all the other parties. However, parties did not use Instagram very frequently in-between election campaigns (Svensson et al., 2020).

Several other studies (Ludwig, 2017; Larsson, 2020; Mohamed, 2019; Nespoli, 2019; but see Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019) report that the level of posting activity varies considerably between different actors. But as of yet, little is known how political roles or socio-demographic factors influence political actors' Instagram activity. Muñoz and Towner (2017) (see also: Towner & Muñoz, 2018) found no clear differences between Democratic and Republican presidential primary candidates: while Trump, Clinton, and Sanders used Instagram most frequently, the other candidates showed similar patterns. In Sweden, the then female leader of the Green Party, Isabella Lövin, used Instagram the least and the leader of the Center Party, Annie Lööf, the most (Grusell & Nord, 2020); in Italy, Matteo Salvini, leader of the far-right Northern League, was considerably more active than Luigi Di Maio, who was then leader of the left-wing Five Start Movement (Nespoli, 2019). In Malaysia, politicians from a party leading the Islamist coalition published the largest number of posts (Ghazali et al., 2019). Regarding the type of political actor, Larsson (2017a) compared the posting activity of Norwegian party accounts and the respective party leaders. The study found that the majority of party leaders were less active than the party accounts.

Regarding the determinants of adoption of Instagram by political actors, the only study statistically analyzing this issue suggests that gender is the only significant predictor for having an account among politicians in the USA, with women being more likely to become users (O'Connell, 2018). In summary, despite these first important findings, we still know relatively little about which political actors use Instagram and what factors determine this.

Manners of Usage

A total of $n = 30$ studies investigated how political actors use Instagram. The vast majority can be described as studies assessing the self-presentation of political actors on Instagram ($n = 23$), exploring whether these actors use Instagram to post on political issues ($n = 11$) or disseminate campaign information ($n = 6$), addressing efforts to mobilize voters ($n = 5$), and interactions between political actors and other Instagram users ($n = 4$).

Self-Presentation. The largest sub-level category identified gathers results on the use of Instagram for self-presentation ($n = 23$). The concept goes back to Gofman (1959), who defined self-presentation as efforts by individuals to build a desirable image (Steffan, 2020). Transferred to the political sphere, self-presentation can thus be understood as a political actor promoting her or his political or private role, or a party promoting itself or their candidates. The category is closely related to the aspect of personalization, a two-fold concept that refers to a focus on individual politicians rather than parties, institutions, or issues, and on politicians' non-political rather than political characteristics (Adam & Maier, 2010). Researchers have argued that social media are prone to personalization (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; McGregor et al., 2017; Metz et al., 2019) and encourage politicians to communicate in a personalized manner (McGregor, 2018).

Overall, it can be concluded that Instagram is a popular tool for promoting a political image (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Grusell & Nord, 2020; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Mohamed, 2019; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019; Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020; Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020; Steffan, 2020). However, the studies addressed different forms of self-presentation. One line of research analyzed the extent to which Instagram posts of parties present the parties' candidate or party leader as the main

subject during a campaign (Russmann et al., 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Another line of research addressed individual politician's self-presentation. Many studies explored the use of selfies (Abidin, 2017; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Grusell & Nord, 2020; O'Connell, 2018; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019), non-political content (A. Azmi et al., 2018; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Grusell & Nord, 2020; Ghazali et al., 2019; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Mohamed, 2019; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; O'Connell, 2018; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019; Rodina & Dligach, 2019; Russmann et al., 2019; Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020; Steffan, 2020), formal-technical visual aspects such as type of color (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017) or shot size (Grusell & Nord, 2020; Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020; Susetya & Nurhayati, 2020), and self-presentation strategies in general, for instance, which traits of the politicians are emphasized (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Grusell & Nord, 2020; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Mendonça & Caetano, 2020; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019; Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020; Steffan, 2020; Susetya & Nurhayati, 2020). Due to the heterogeneity of the studies, it is difficult to make definite statements about the characteristics of individual actors or contexts determining the use of the various forms of self-presentations. However, some cautious assumptions can be derived and are explained in the following.

Strong differences were found between party accounts in Sweden, Norway (Russmann et al., 2019), and Spain (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019) on Instagram in terms of the proportion of posts that represent the top candidate (i.e., the candidate for the election that the study addressed). The share ranged from 0% to 80%, but no recurring patterns could be identified. Findings suggest that a center-right Spanish challenger party, Ciudadanos, promoted its candidate more often than the other two traditional parties and a left-wing challenger party in the sample. Moreover, Ciudadanos increased this strategy over time (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Comparing countries, the total share of posts depicting the top candidate was around 55% in the Swedish elections of 2014 and 76% in the Norwegian elections of 2017 (Russmann et al., 2019). Therefore, this difference could be due to both national specificities and/or an adaptation of the communication strategy over time.

Regarding individual politicians, several of the studies that examined the use of selfies did not provide a concrete definition (Abidin, 2017; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Grusell & Nord, 2020). Thus, it remains unclear whether the authors followed a narrow definition and included only self-portraits taken by the politicians themselves (Sorokowski et al., 2015), or, like other authors (e.g., Poulakidakos and Giannouli, 2019), applied a broader concept.

Ekman & Widholm (2017) found that female politicians used selfies more often than males, and that selfies were combined with political messages. Grusell and Nord (2020) found that Swedish party leaders used selfies in only 2% of their posts on average. Members of the U.S. Congress (O'Connell, 2018) included selfies, defined as "photos or videos taken by the member, with himself or herself in the photo or video" (O'Connel, 2018, p. 4), in only 1.5% of their posts. The author identified age as a possible determinant for the communication of selfies: younger members of congress posted selfies more often. Using a similar operationalization to compare the use of selfies on two social media platforms, Farkas and Bene (2020) found that Hungarian political candidates posted selfies in 11% of their Instagram posts, while the share was only 3% on Facebook.

Poulakidakos and Giannouli (2019) defined selfies more broadly and also included photos that showed the process of a selfie being taken. Therefore, the findings cannot be compared readily with the other studies. But the authors found that the share of these images in three Greek party leaders' posts was similarly low, ranging from 0.7% to 5.5%. Nevertheless, the politicians were still depicted in the majority of their posts (regardless of whether the pictures were selfies). This is in line with other studies that have found that the majority of images posted on Instagram by politicians show an image of them. For example, the Spanish right-wing politician Abascal appears in 81% of hist posts (Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020).

Abidin (2017) looked deeper into how selfies are implemented in a politician's communicative strategy. The author performed a qualitative case study of the Instagram account of a Singaporean politician. The findings suggested that selfies can be used as a form of personal branding strategy which is similar to influencer aesthetics and lacks the distance that is conventional in the political sphere.

Social media are susceptible to drawing attention to non-political aspects of a politician or party (Ekman & Widholm, 2017) and thus many of the studies explored whether political actors communicated non-political content on Instagram. The studies operationalized this type of content mostly as posts

relating to the everyday or personal lives of political actors or images depicting them in a private context, that is, content that is not related to the political or professional role of the actor (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; O'Connell, 2018; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019; Russmann et al., 2019), or images of and references to a politician in her or his spare time (Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). Other studies operationalized non-political content as personal activities (Ghazali et al., 2019; Mohamed, 2019) such as pictures of pets or food (Ghazali et al., 2019; Mohamed, 2019), or daily routines (Ghazali et al., 2019). It remains unclear whether the latter can also refer to work routines. Still, others included informal content such as spontaneous shots or casual clothing in their content analysis (Farkas & Bene, 2020) or incorporated informal attire (i.e., a politician "without a suit jacket"; Munoz & Towner, 2017, p. 302), casual or athletic clothing, and physical activity in their visual framing analysis (Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Steffan, 2020). Grusell and Nord (2020) distinguished between personal and private content: while both are not related to the professional life of a politician, private content explicitly refers to "off-work situations" (Grusell & Nord, 2020, p. 7). However, results were only reported for "everyday life private" and "everyday professional" images (Grusell & Nord, 2020, p. 11).

There are also studies that adopted an inductive approach to analyze non-political content. One study used topic modeling (i.e., a machine learning approach to detect "latent semantic content in a collection of documents", Rodina & Dligach, 2017, p. 5) to identify personal and political topics in Instagram captions. Personal topics included well-wishes, friendship, nature (i.e., pictures of landscapes and animals or texts describing the qualities of nature), and physical activities (Rodina & Dligach, 2019). Other studies qualitatively topologized politician's Instagram posts as belonging to the private stage (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017), or identified motives related to sports and religion tied to personal elements without specifically focusing on personal content (Avedissian, 2016). And one study (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017) focused on visual content and identified non-political content in an image type called "background stories", defined as "visual imagery which presents the candidate as a person rather than a political figure, places him/her in an individual, biographical context, emphasizes his/her personal attributes […] and indicates the politician's 'private' interests and priorities" (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017, p. 20).

Although different operationalizations – as well as the wide range of actors, countries, and types of research – hamper comparison of the findings, two recurring observations stand out: First, most studies addressing non-political content in some form found that political or professional content dominated on the Instagram accounts of political actors. The only exception was a far-right party leader (Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). Second, several authors (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Rodina & Dligach, 2019; Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020) identified the combination of professional and personal content as a relevant characteristic of political communication on Instagram. Further findings have to be considered with caution due to the different methods used. Table 2 presents the results of the studies on non-political content grouped by operationalization.

There is a lack of reliable indications as to which actors are more likely to stage themselves in a private context, although the existing studies provide preliminary insights. When comparing countries, the only study of those analyzing party accounts during election campaigns found slightly more private content with Norwegian parties during the 2017 election campaign than with Swedish ones during the 2014 campaign – however, this could also be a sign that strategies have been adapted to the platform over time (Russmann et al., 2019). Regarding individual politicians, there is a lack of reliable indications as to which actors are more likely to communicate this kind of personal content, and when. For example, there are no studies comparing campaign periods with general periods. Overall, members of U.S. congress hardly posted any private content (8%; O'Connell, 2018) while Swedish politicians did so in 33% of their posts on average (Ekman & Widholm, 2017). But since the databases were very different (543 members of U.S. congress and 16 Swedish politicians), this can only be taken as a first cautious indication of possible national differences. Regarding individual characteristics, O'Connell (2018) found that U.S. members of congress' gender had no effect on their likelihood to post non-political content. Differentiating by party affiliation, Republican members of congress had a higher chance of posting both personal and professional content (O'Connell, 2018). Ekman and Widholm (2017) noted that politicians from a Swedish far-right party stood out by communicating "depoliticized and highly privatized" (Ekman & Widholm, 2017, p. 28). That fits in with the finding that the Spanish far-right party leader Santiago Abascal posted more photos depicting him during his spare time (29%) than emphasizing his profes-

sional role (24%; Sampietro and Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). Although this single-case study does not allow to draw stable conclusions about differences regarding party affiliation in general, these findings as a whole can be taken as a first sign that center-right and far-right parties may be more inclined to offer glimpses into their private lives than center-left parties.

Comparing social media platforms, there is evidence from Hungary that political candidates rather used Instagram than Facebook to distribute informal visual content (Farkas & Bene, 2020). However, formal elements were still widely present on Instagram too, and most images (61%) were campaign-related.

Since Instagram is a multimodal medium, the question arises as to the form in which non-political content is communicated. A separate analysis of images and text of Spanish far-right party leader Santiago Abascal (Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020) showed that the share of photos depicting the politician during his spare time was higher (29%) than the share of textual references to leisure time (14%) and sports (10%). Furthermore, Rodina and Dligach (2019) found that the combination of political and non-political content can occur within a caption, not just by pairing an image with text. For example, Ramzan Kadyrov, dictatorial head of the Chechen Republic, combined political discussions with private anecdotes. Regarding the integration of Instagram into the overall campaign strategy, Liebhart and Bernhardt (2017, p. 20) found that visual personal Instagram messages were used to emphasize a "homeland" motif, a key element of Austrian Federal President Van der Bellen's 2016 campaign.

The portrayal of a politician's family is a special case of the representation of personal content and some studies also reported on references to, or display of, politicians' family members separate from general non-political content (A. Azmi et al., 2018; Dobkiewicz, 2019; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Grusell & Nord, 2020; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Mohamed, 2019; O'Connell, 2018; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019; Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). Others included this aspect in their general analysis of non-political content (Rodina & Dligach, 2019; Russmann et al., 2019). There are also studies that did not explicitly deal with the analysis of family content, but addressed this aspect as part of comprehensive visual framing analyses (Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Steffan, 2020).

Overall, the findings show that the proportion of posts that mention or depict family members is relatively similar across countries. Among members of the U.S. Congress, the family was present in about 7% of Instagram posts (O'Connell, 2018). For Hungarian candidates, the proportion was 6% during an election campaign (Farkas & Bene, 2020). The leader of the Spanish far-right party VOX showed his family in 10% of the pictures and mentioned it in about 7% of his captions (Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). An Indonesian Mayor often posted family pictures (no numbers available; A. Azmi et al., 2018). Swedish party leaders posted images of family members and themselves in 4% of their posts during an election campaign (Grusell & Nord, 2020). A qualitative assessment of Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau's references to his family concluded that the politician showed them mainly in professional settings and private depictions were rarely published (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017).

References to a politicians' family life are a highly relevant aspect of gender research. For example, they are used as a criterion for analyzing gender biases in media coverage (Dan & Iorgoveanu, 2013; Ross et al., 2013). The only study (O'Connell, 2018) that analyzed the relationship between gender and display of the family found that gender did not predict the portrayal of the family among members of U.S. congress. Instead, the age of the politicians seemed to be a better predictor: younger members posted photos of their family more often.

Comparing the frequency with which members of different parties publish references to their families on Instagram, there are several indications that politicians belonging to conservative parties show or mention their family more often than those who lean further to the left. If a member of U.S. congress was Republican, the share of posts including a family member was around 3% higher than that of a Democrat (O'Connell, 2018). Results from Greece are similar: A liberal-conservative party leader showed his family in more than 20% of his posts; for center-left and left-wing party leaders, the figures were only 1.7% and 0.7%, respectively (Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019). In Sweden, members of the Christian Democrats (16%), the Liberals (13%), and the Sweden Democrats (10%) showed their family relatively often, while members of parties closer to the political left rather displayed cultural actors (their share of family representations was not disclosed; Ekman & Widholm, 2017). However, another study from Sweden (Grusell & Nord, 2020) found that it was the Social Democratic Prime Minister who posted the most images with family members. Since this observation focused on photographs displaying the family and himself, the results can't be readily compared. Mohamed (2019) examined the

posts of three Malaysian Prime Minister candidates during a campaign period and found that posts depicting the family accounted for 6% of the total sample. It was found that the candidate of the Islamist coalition showed the family less often (2%) than the conservative incumbent and the candidate of the center-left coalition (13% each). However, these data must be treated with caution due to the small samples per politician (n = 15, n = 32, and n = 91). Thus, as with general non-political content, there is initial evidence that members of center-right and right parties may tend to present their family more often than those of left-wing parties.

Comparing social media platforms, Farkas and Bene (2020) found significant differences: Hungarian candidates with accounts on both outlets presented their family members in 6% of their Instagram images, but in only 2% of images posted on Facebook.

Again, there is a lack of studies exploring when political actors show, or refer to, their family on Instagram. For example, only two of the previously mentioned studies (Farkas & Bene, 2020; Mohamed, 2019) explored the presentation of the family during campaign periods. Thus, there are no findings yet on whether election campaigns, as intensive phases of political communication, have a reinforcing influence on the dissemination of non-political content in general and family in particular.

The broader self-presentation strategies on Instagram can also be differentiated by their emphasis on political or non-political features. Regarding political traits, a recurring element was the creation of a statesmanship attitude, for example, by staging oneself as if already in office by reciting the national anthem (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017) or using national symbols such as flags (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). Other authors found that political actors' Instagram pictures seem to aim "to accentuate the image of well-groomed and positive party leaders who enjoy their work" (Grusell & Nord, 2020, p. 13). Two studies summarized these strategies, following Grabe and Bucy (2009), as the ideal candidate frame. The frame consists of two dimensions: images communicating statesmanship (e.g., pictures showing elected officials or patriotic symbols) or compassion (e.g., pictures showing children or gestures of affinity). It was frequently used by U.S. presidential primary candidates (Muñoz & Towner, 2017) as well as fourteen candidates for main office from five European countries, Canada, and the USA (Steffan, 2020) in their Instagram communications. However, no national comparisons can be drawn here since Steffan (2020) focused on overall strategies and the detailed results were not reported separately for Instagram.

A qualitative study (Susetya & Nurhayati, 2020) found that an Indonesian political candidate presented himself as a democratic leader in the election campaign. However, this finding is based on the analysis of only two Instagram posts and should therefore be treated with caution. A different strategy was identified in Bolsonaro's visual communication: the far-right Brazilian president tends to stage himself as the antithesis of a statesman, for example, by wearing unprofessional outfits or even appearing topless while performing presidential duties (Mendonça & Caetano, 2020).

With regard to non-political traits, several studies found that political actors also use Instagram to demonstrate closeness to citizens, for instance, by presenting themselves as everyday persons (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Mendonça & Caetano, 2020), establishing eye contact with the viewer in approximately one third of their posts (Grusell & Nord, 2020; Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020), or with large crowds (Dobkiewicz, 2019). Interestingly, Mendonça and Caetano (2020) found that Brazilian president Bolsonaro not only mirrored the people by emphasizing his ordinariness or mass appeal, but simultaneously posted images through which he created a distance to the people and highlighted his extraordinariness. Examples of this strategy include posts in which he displayed military signs, documented his recovery from a stabbing attack, or demonstrated 'upper-class' activities such as horse riding. Thus, the messages of one and the same actor can be ambiguous. Another common feature was the use of endorsement posts (i.e., images in which the politician demonstrated closeness to famous personalities; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; O'Connell, 2018; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019). This strategy was also revealed by two studies in the populist campaigner frame by Grabe and Bucy (2009). The frame comprises of images related to mass appeal (e.g., pictures of large audiences) or ordinariness (e.g., pictures showing the politicians in casual clothes or with ordinary people; Muñoz & Towner, 2017, p. 299). U.S. presidential primary candidates (Muñoz & Towner, 2017) and candidates from Europe, Canada, and the USA (Steffan, 2020) presented themselves less often as populist campaigners than as ideal candidates on Instagram.

On a broader level, there are indications that Instagram is used to promote a positive self-image rather than to engage in negative campaigning (Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019). This is even true for politicians who are otherwise known for their aggressive communicative behavior, like Donald Trump (Dobkiewicz, 2019). Similarly, Farkas and Bene (2020) found that most images (64%) posted by Hungarian candidates conveyed a positive sentiment. Holiday et al. (2015) demonstrated that political actors adapt their messages on Instagram to their target audience: the Syrian Presidency communicated different topics for its English-speaking and Arabic-speaking audiences. While posts with English captions more often contained visual representations of patriotism and nationalism, those with Arabic text more frequently featured visualizations of empathy.

Comparing Instagram with other social media outlets, Steffan (2020) found several differences. For instance, the ideal candidate frame was used significantly more often on Instagram than on Facebook. Moreover, politicians on Instagram were significantly more likely to use the populist campaigner frame than on Twitter, emphasizing both their mass appeal through posts depicting large crowds, and their ordinariness, e.g., through informal attire.

There is little research on how compositional elements, for example, type of shots, angles, or colors (Schill, 2012) are implemented by political actors, and when. Lalancette and Raynauld (2017) showed how Justin Trudeau drew on monochrome shots when presenting significant moments in his career. Sampietro and Sánchez-Castillo (2020) found that Spanish far-right party leader Abascal mostly posted photographs using medium shots (40%) and normal camera angles (62%; the shot types were not defined). Similarly, Swedish party leaders mostly used establishing shots (68%) or medium shots (18%) straight from the front (98%) while close-ups were used in only 6% of their images (the shot types were not defined; Grusell & Nord, 2020). Whether these techniques differ by post content has not yet been explored. But there is preliminary evidence that the use of shot types may differ by gender: in Sweden, female politicians tended to use more close shots (i.e., close-ups of their faces and half-body shots) in selfies than males (Ekman & Widholm, 2017). Susetya and Nurhayati (2020) offered a qualitative description of shot size and angle in two posts by an Indonesian political candidate.

Political Issues. Previous research has demonstrated that political actors rarely use social media platforms to address political issues –even services such Twitter, which are primarily geared to the dissemination of written messages (Jungherr, 2016). Eleven studies (Avedissian, 2016; Dobkiewicz, 2019; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Ludwig, 2017; Nespoli, 2019; Rodina & Dligach, 2019; Towner & Muñoz, 2018; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019) were identified that looked at this aspect on Instagram: they examined whether and how political actors use the platform to post about political issues. Although these statements must be treated with caution due to the different research designs and sample sizes (Table 1), political issues seem to be less relevant than self-presentation. Moreover, there is evidence that posts disseminating political issues and posts aimed at managing a politician's image cannot be regarded as strictly separate: political issues were often framed in a private setting (Rodina & Dligach, 2019) or combined with self-imagery (Ekman & Widholm, 2017). These results confirm previous findings that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between political issues and images (Kaid, 2004), and that political issues are often used to bolster a candidate's image (Rudd, 1986). Towner and Muñoz (2018) found that political issues were communicated primarily by text.

Several studies did not indicate how many of the analyzed actors' Instagram posts included a political issue, making comparisons difficult. However, there is some evidence on what is determining political actors' communication of political issues on Instagram. Regarding type of actor, parties do not seem "to have used Instagram as a means of systematically communicating their policy positions" (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019, p. 12). In Spain, the share of posts that were classified as including party policy ranged from zero (Ciudadanos, 2016 election) to 14% (Partido Popular, 2015 election), although the author notes that the number of posts of the latter was so low that this result should not be overinterpreted (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Individual politicians occasionally communicated political issues, too. For example, the Canadian prime minister Trudeau referred to different areas of government activities in is Instagram posts. He mentioned employment and social development most often (12%) and technology least often (7%; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017). Similarly, an Austrian political candidate shared his position on political issues in 9% of his posts and 35% of Swedish politicians' Instagram posts contained some form of political message (Ekman & Widholm, 2017). And a dictatorial leader mainly posted on three issues – Islam, government public relations (PR), and Russia – in an effort to main-

tain his "monopoly over Chechen national symbols and identity" (Avedissian, 2016 p. 37).

Comparing the communication of political issues on Instagram between political parties, both Ludwig (2017) and Towner and Muñoz (2018) found that during the 2016 U.S. campaign, Democratic candidates spread information on policy issues more often than Republicans: Ludwig (2017) found that Republican candidates included political issues in 14% of their posts and Democratic candidates in 27%. Towner and Muñoz (2018) showed that both Clinton and Sanders included more political issues in their Instagram posts than all Republican candidates combined. Both Democrats and Republicans addressed primarily issues associated with their party (Ludwig, 2017). The Republican candidate Trump posted on security, anti-immigration, and economics. The author (Dobkiewicz, 2019) concluded that the emphasis on security issues reflects Trump's authoritarianism (i.e., "the belief that societies should be strictly ordered and that violation of this order deserves severe punishment", Dobkiewicz, 2019, p. 828). Yet overall, Trump used his account more for self-presentation than for communicating political issues (Dobkiewicz, 2019). For Sweden, Ekman and Widholm (2017) found that while the Green Party included political issues in 59% of their posts, the Sweden Democrats did the same in only 7%. Nespoli (2019) focused on specific political issues and showed that two Italian left- and right-wing politicians included issues related to labor and industry policies in 30% (Di Maio) and 5% (Salvini) of their posts.

Farkas and Bene (2020) compared Instagram and Facebook. They found that the share of images including a "visual representation of policies" (Farkas & Bene, 2020, p. 10) was significantly lower on Instagram (4%) than on Facebook (12%).

Mobilization. The third manner of usage, which was identified for n = 5 studies (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Ludwig, 2017; Russmann et al., 2019; Svensson et al., 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019), is the aspect of mobilization of voters. Mobilization here refers not to a possible activating effect on recipients, but to a strategy on the part of the communicator which is known to be an important aspect of political communication online (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Based on Filimonov et al. (2016), mobilization can be defined as any communication aimed at encouraging the recipient to take action. Most authors included in this review took a broad perspective and assessed posts encouraging users to take action in general (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Russmann et al., 2019; Svensson et al., 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). One looked specifically into posts soliciting donations (Ludwig, 2017). All but one (Svensson et al., 2020) can be anchored to campaigns.

During election campaigns, an Austrian political candidate used Instagram to mobilize supporters by calling to action in around 12% of his posts (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017). Ludwig (2017) found that U.S. candidates hardly solicited donations on Instagram. Studies on political parties revealed diverging mobilization tendencies during election campaigns. While Norwegian parties used mobilizing content in as much as one third of their posts in 2017, Swedish parties hardly used any in 2014 (Russmann et al., 2019). Comparing the level of mobilization by party affiliation, left-wing parties (Russmann et al., 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019) seem to be more inclined towards mobilizing efforts on Instagram. In Spain, for example, only Podemos showed significant mobilization efforts (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). In-between election campaigns, Swedish parties also hardly used Instagram to mobilize their followers (Svensson et al., 2020). However, this result must be viewed with caution, as the study was a transmedia analysis and Instagram was only a small part of the sample (n = 19).

Campaign Information. Another category encompasses n = 6 studies that analyzed whether political actors use Instagram to disseminate information with a campaign focus (Farkas & Bene, 2020; Ghazali et al., 2019; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Ludwig, 2017; Mohamed, 2019; Roosinda et al., 2018). They had one common characteristic: they focused on political candidates. Yet, operationalizations diverged. They ranged from promotion of campaign events (Farkas & Bene, 2020; Ludwig, 2017), party content in the form of ads, flyers, slogans, and posters (Farkas & Bene, 2020; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019), campaign clothing (Farkas & Bene, 2020), fieldwork (Mohamed, 2019) and messages (Roosinda et al., 2018), and professional campaign material and campaign activities (Ghazali et al., 2019; Mohamed, 2019) to all content relevant to the campaign, including advertising material, but also posts depicting the politician giving speeches at rallies (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017). The authors concluded that Instagram can function as an alternative platform to distribute advertising material.

Interaction. Four studies looked into how Swedish parties (Russmann & Svensson, 2017; Svensson et al., 2020), Swedish politicians (Ekman & Widholm, 2017), and a Canadian governmental project (Gruzd et al., 2018) use Instagram to interact with other Instagram users (e.g., their followers). In theory, social media platforms like Instagram provide the possibilities to interact with other users, for example, by replying to comments. However, research on Twitter (Adams & McCorkindale, 2013; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011) or Facebook (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2015), suggest that political actors rarely use these features.

Interaction was operationalized as politicians' or parties' responses to user comments (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Russmann & Svensson, 2017), but Svensson et al. (2020) and Russmann and Svensson (2017) focused on three comments per post. Gruzd et al. (2018) took a broader approach and addressed interaction with regard to a community category that consists of the following subcategories: "giving recognition and thanks; acknowledgement of current and local events; response to reply messages; and response solicitation" (Gruzd et al., 2018, p. 5).

Levels of interactivity differed greatly, both for parties and politicians. Swedish parties hardly engaged in interaction with their followers, whether during an election campaign (Russmann & Svensson, 2017) or when no campaign was ongoing (Svensson et al., 2020). An exception was one party not represented in parliament (Russmann & Svensson, 2017).

Ekman and Widholm (2017) found significant differences between individual politicians. The level of interactivity varied between 2% and 86%, although all politicians in the sample were established actors. Gruzd et al. (2018) found that a governmental project gave recognition to users by posting their images in 32% of Instagram postings.

Additional Findings. Some aspects were only addressed by few studies and are thus reported jointly. Three studies investigated how political actors referenced other media in their posts (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Grusell & Nord, 2020; Russmann et al., 2019). The authors found evidence for this hybrid Instagram use, suggesting that Instagram is part of a transmedia campaign strategy (Russmann et al., 2019). Grusell and Nord (2020) found that 35% of Swedish party leaders' Instagram posts during an election campaign consisted of content forwarded from traditional media (the term was not defined). Ekman & Widholm (2017) found that leading Swedish politicians included references to news media (e.g., screenshots of newspaper articles written by the politicians, or video footage from television interviews) in about 20% of their posts (Ekman & Widholm, 2017, p. 25-26). The authors pointed out that the forwarded media content was often used to criticize the political opponent. Regarding party affiliation, center-parties posted references to news media more often than parties located at the left and right of the political spectrum (Ekman & Widholm, 2017).

A qualitative study took a linguistic approach and assessed the sentence effectiveness of 15 Instagram captions consisting of 73 sentences (Oktarina & Ermanto, 2019). The authors defined effective sentences as those "that correspond to linguistic rules" (Oktarina & Ermanto, 2019, p. 229) and communicate to the reader exactly what the author wanted to convey. The authors identified 49% of the analyzed sentences posted in Instagram as effective.

Effects

The effects of political actors' Instagram activity are not yet well understood. Potential reasons for this knowledge gap are a lack of research in general and experimental design in particular as well as a limited comparability due to differing research designs. At the same time, the remarkable methodological diversity at this early stage of research is valuable. The research to date provides indications of what type of content or characteristics might influence the impact of political communication on Instagram. Table 3 provides an overview of all studies addressing effects of political actors Instagram communication (n = 15). They were subdivided into effects on users (n = 14) and effects on media agenda (n = 2).

Effects on Users. The majority of the studies (n = 10) looked into how different types of content affect Instagram users. Other studies analyzed the effects of external or individual factors (n = 5) or the interaction of content and individual characteristics (n = 1). Most studies addressed effects on users by comparing the engagement rates, such as likes and comments, of different types of posts. Only two studies (Jung et al., 2017; Lindholm et al., 2020) applied an experimental or quasi-experimental design that allows to establish causal relationships. The key findings are discussed below (for a complete overview, please refer to Table 3). It must be noted, however, that due to the different methods and operationalizations, these can only be initial indications and should be handled with caution.

Type of Content. The studies suggest that posts on party accounts that demonstrate support of celebrities, include branding material, or references to other media channels do not determine user engagement (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). There is preliminary evidence that mobilizing content (i.e., posts including a call to action, such as going to the polls or following a politician on social media; Russmann & Svensson, 2017) leads to increased user engagement (Russmann & Svensson, 2017; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Moreover, posts on political issues seem to lead to less engagement (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Findings on effects of personalized content are inconclusive. There is early evidence that engagement increases when politicians post pictures of themselves, or when parties post pictures of their candidate (Farkas & Bene, 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Comparing social media platforms, Farkas and Bene (2020) found that users on both Facebook and Instagram were more likely to like images depicting the respective candidate. However, posts on party accounts that were personalized (i.e., that depicted "only (or more) single person(s)"; Russmann & Svensson, 2017, p. 57) experienced less user comments than others (Russmann & Svensson, 2017).

Non-political (e.g., private and personal or informal content) seems to affect user engagement, but the results partly contradict each other. O'Connell (2020) found that for politicians, personal content, such as family or personal photos, had a positive effect on both likes and comments. Similarly, Farkas and Bene (2020) found that while informal images in general mostly showed no significant effect on the number of likes, images depicting politicians' family members increased the number of likes. This effect was not only observed on Instagram, but also on Facebook. Spontaneous shots had a negative effect on the number of likes a post received (Farkas & Bene, 2020). Formal images (e.g., images that include policy content or party symbols) did not generate more likes on Instagram, but they did on Facebook (Farkas & Bene, 2020). If parties posted private images (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019) or selfies and snapshots on Instagram (Russmann & Svensson, 2017), the effect on likes and comments was mostly negative. Larsson (2020) took a different approach and assessed the characteristics of the posts with the highest engagement rates (viral posts) on Instagram. The author found that posts showing a party leader backstage were highly successful. This seems also to apply to selfies: there are early indications that posts including self-images attract more likes and comments (Ekman & Widholm, 2017). Moreover, a qualitative study (Abidin, 2017) performing a case study of a Singaporean politician who is known for posting selfies on Instagram pointed out that citizens' reactions had mainly been positive, "with many users complimenting his looks, thanking him for his work and expressing their support during the election campaigning period" (Abidin, 2017, p. 81).

Muñoz and Towner (2017) analyzed the effects of politicians' self-presentation strategies on engagement rates (i.e., likes and comments) of Instagram posts. They compared posts framing politicians as ideal candidates (i.e., emphasizing statesmanship and compassion) or populist campaigners (i.e., emphasizing mass appeal and ordinariness). The posts with the highest number of likes and comments belonged to the ideal candidate frame (Muñoz & Towner, 2017).

One experimental (Jung et al., 2017) and one quasi-experimental (Lindholm et al., 2020) study analyzed the effect of politicians' self-personalization on Instagram by comparing posts with a private or public focus. Jung et al. (2017) used a sample of 120 undergraduate students and a 2 (self-presentation style: high vs. low level of personalization) x 2 (level of interactivity: high vs. low) between-subject design to study the effects on participants' evaluation of politicians' character. Participants in the high personalization condition saw Instagram posts with pictures of a politician in a private setting (e.g., with the family). Those in the low personalization condition were presented with pictures showing the politician in a public setting (e.g., discussing public issues). The level of interactivity was manipulated with the accompanying text and comments (e.g., in the high interactivity condition, the politician responded to comments and used first person pronouns; the opposite was true in the low interactivity condition). Jung et al. (2017) found that a high level of interactivity and professional content had positive effects on participants' evaluation of politicians' character. While no individual effect on voting intention was found, the combination of various types of self-presentation seemed to matter: low personalized (i.e., highly public) content paired with a high level of interactivity, and vice versa, generated positive effects on voting intention.

Using a quasi-experimental posttest-only design and eye-tracking methods, Lindholm et al. (2020) looked into how $N = 20$ students paid attention to Instagram posts of one female and one male party leader. They found that overall, Instagram posts with images showing the politicians in a public setting (e.g., official portraits, pictures of the politicians during campaign work, or meeting colleagues) captured attention longer

than private imagery (e.g., pictures of the politicians at home, enjoying leisure time, or doing sports). When presented with public pictures, the recipients focused their attention on people (other than the respective politicians) or details in the image. When they saw a picture showing a politician in a private setting, the recipients fixated longer on the politician's face. The authors assumed that private posts draw the focus on the individual. Moreover, they found evidence that the effects of political communication on Instagram were partly influenced by politicians' gender. The effect of private content on the focus of attention on the face was especially strong for the female politician. In addition, public images improved recipients' perceptions of the politicians' character (i.e., traits related to compassion and trustworthiness) more strongly for the male politician (effects were compared against a control group of 12 students). An effect on perceived competence (i.e., traits related to competence and leadership) was even found exclusively for the male politician. Private pictures, on the other hand, did not affect impression of competence traits. However, they had a positive effect on the character evaluation of the female politician. Regarding general conclusions about gender stereotypes, the authors advise caution because the treatment consisted of one female and one male party leader only (Lindholm et al., 2020).

External Factors and Individual Characteristics. Turning to external variables, there are first indications that accounts of party leaders score higher engagement rates than those of parties (Larsson, 2017a), and that leaders from smaller parties engage users similarly than those of large parties (Larsson, 2020). Regarding specific political actors, Nespoli (2019) found that Matteo Salvini (Northern League) received on average more likes and comments for his posts than Luigi Di Maio (Five Star Movement). However, Di Maio received more reactions when the posts dealt with labor issues. Comparing party accounts, one study found that new parties had higher engagement rates than established parties (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). In fact, whether a party was a newcomer party or an established party had a stronger impact on user engagement than the type of content (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). This result could be a first indication that Instagram is a useful communication outlet for new or small political actors. However, this is contradicted by the findings by O'Connell (2020) who examined whether a member of Congress's "real world political importance" (O'Connell, 2020, p. 3) impacted her or his follower count on Instagram. The concept was operationalized with five variables: service in House or Senate, number of terms served, former or potential future presidential candidate, party leader, and ideological extremity. For example, being a party leader or ideologically extreme increased a politicians' real world importance. O'Connell (2020) controlled for a multitude of variables, including individual characteristics, type of content, and Instagram activity. Real world importance was found to be the strongest predictor of the number of followers of a politician's account, whereas personal characteristics were less important. Overall, a politician's follower count was not strongly predicted by the type of content that was posted. However, personal content and celebrity photos showed a positive effect on the number of followers. According to the author, one reason for this could be that Instagram offers few features to share other people's content. While it is easy to share another user's post on Facebook and Twitter, on Instagram this is only possible in one's own Instagram story or with the help of other apps. Thus, users are unlikely to stumble across a politician's content by chance and will most likely choose to follow a politician because of offline characteristics (O'Connell, 2020). To sum up, the existing studies do not allow for a definitive conclusion on whether established, powerful (O'Connell, 2020) or less established actors (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019) have an advantage on Instagram.

Other Factors. Gruzd et al. (2018) compared Instagram and Twitter, and found that Instagram has a significantly higher level of user engagement than the latter, as posts on Instagram received both more likes and comments than posts on Twitter.

Effects on Media Agenda. Towner and Muñoz (2018) found preliminary evidence for an overall relationship between political issues discussed in politicians' Instagram posts and those discussed in newspaper articles. However, the indications that the content of candidates' posts followed that of newspapers were relatively weak (Towner & Muñoz, 2018). A qualitative case study on the Singaporean politician Baey Yam Keng provided additional insights into how Instagram content was taken up by other media (Abidin, 2017): the politician became known for his use of selfies, and newspapers as well as user-generated sites (e.g., an anonymous account on the social networking site Tumblr) reported on them. This way, his posts circulated outside of Instagram.

Comparison of Instagram to Other Social Media Platforms

Of the n = 10 studies examining additional social media platforms besides Instagram, n = 8 take a comparative perspective in terms of user analysis, manners of usage, and effects. Their results were partially described under the categories User analysis (Larsson (2017b), Self-presentation (Farkas & Bene, 2020; Steffan, 2020), Political issues (Farkas & Bene, 2020), and Effects (Farkas & Bene, 2020; Gruzd et al., 2018). However, the results are described jointly in this section because comparisons allow for conclusions about how platform affordances shape political actors' social media use (Bossetta 2018) and how political actors strategically adapt their communications to each platform.

Regarding user analysis, Larsson (2017b) found that Instagram is developing differently than the longer-standing platform Twitter. Contrary to expectations based on the normalization and equalization hypotheses, the author showed that citizens and members of smaller parties were amongst the most active Twitter users. On Instagram, both smaller and larger parties were among the most active users. However, the most frequently employed hashtags on Instagram were related to established political actors. This suggests that these actors dominate on the platform in terms of users' attention.

Farkas & Bene (2020) analyzed how many of the candidates in the Hungarian general election in 2018 "who either reached at least 1% of the votes in any of the 106 single-member districts or were named in any of the first thirty places of a party list that received at least 0.5% of votes" (p. 8) had an Instagram or Facebook account. They found that Facebook (82%) was more popular than Instagram (10%).

Regarding manners of usage, there are indications that political actors treat Instagram differently than on other social media platforms. First, some studies from Scandinavia suggest that Instagram lags behind Twitter and Facebook (Larsson, 2020; Svensson et al., 2020) in terms of the frequency of political actors' posts. The researchers attributed these results to the fact that Twitter is well suited to spreading news widely because of its ability to retweet tweets from others. On Instagram, this function is not available by default (Svensson et al., 2020). Moreover, Twitter is popular among journalists, which makes it more attractive to political actors (Svensson et al., 2020). Additionally, Larsson (2017b) pointed out that Twitter is more reactive to media coverage than Instagram and serves as a second screen for media events such as televised debates.

Second, Instagram seems to be the preferred medium for informal messages (e.g., posts including selfies or pictures of family members, or captions conveying personal messages): politicians posted more informal images on Instagram than on Facebook (Farkas & Bene, 2020). The authors concluded that Instagram is strategically used "to exhibit the 'human' sides of politicians" (Farkas & Bene, 2020, p. 16). However, formal posts and images related to political campaigns were still more common on Instagram than informal posts (Farkas & Bene, 2020). Similarly, the findings suggest that political actors use Facebook as their primary channel of communication (Ghazali et al., 2019) and Twitter to disseminate information (Gruzd et al., 2018). In contrast, political actors resort to Instagram to boost their image (Ghazali et al., 2019) or employ a more narrative and aesthetic means of communication (Gruzd et al., 2018). Comparing user reactions in general, Gruzd et al. (2018) found that Instagram had a higher level of engagement (in terms of likes and comments) than Twitter.

Looking at visual framing strategies, Steffan (2020) found that politicians presented themselves by using an ideal candidate frame (e.g., by emphasizing statesmanship qualities or compassion), significantly more often on Instagram than on Facebook. However, the populist campaigner frame (i.e., emphasis of mass appeal or ordinariness) was used more often on Instagram than on Twitter. The author concluded "that Instagram is the preferred platform for candidates' visual self-presentation in election campaigns" (Steffan, 2020, p. 3111). Overall, these findings suggest that political actors adapt their communication to the affordances of a platform, but also to user norms (Farkas & Bene, 2020). Instagram seems particularly suitable for conveying a rather informal image. This could be because Instagram's focus is on images. In addition, Instagram tends to be informal, as the platform's shot-and-share technology encourages the distribution of private content such as snapshots of food or vacations (Schill & Hendricks, 2018). Conversely, other platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook, may be more attractive for disseminating more formal political messages or news (Farkas & Bene, 2020; Gruzd et al., 2018), and for accompanying media events as a second screen (Larsson, 2017b).

These differences in platform usage lead to the question of whether users also have certain expectations of the messages suitable for a platform, and whether their evaluation of political actors' communication is affected by the medium through which it is transmitted. Comparing effects on users, Farkas and Bene (2020) found that formal images had a

positive effect on the number of likes on Facebook, but not on Instagram. However, most informal images had no significant positive effect on the number of likes on either Instagram or Facebook. An exception were pictures of the family: they had a positive effect on the number of likes on both platforms. Similarly, users on both Facebook and Instagram seemed to prefer pictures that show the politician (Farkas & Bene, 2020). On the other hand, Larsson (2020) found that the posts with the highest engagement rates on Instagram were rather informal, for example, an image showing a party leader backstage, whereas posts with conservative messages or controversial takes on Immigration were among the most popular on Facebook.

Findings on Research Approaches

The review of the studies disclosed a variety of methods and theoretical concepts applied. These are outlined in the following. Research approaches were assessed with regards to Instagram –methods for the analysis of other media were not considered.

Methods

Overall, there were more quantitative (n = 20) than qualitative studies (n = 6), and n = 11 adopted a mixed-method approach. The dominant method was content analysis (n = 20), both quantitative (n = 15) and in the context of a mix-method approach (n = 5). Four studies applied analysis of digital trace data (i.e., data documenting user activities) accessed through APIs (Jungherr, 2016). Other methods were qualitative descriptive analysis (n = 5), image type analysis (n = 2), visual semiotic analysis (n = 2), discourse analysis (n = 2), frame analysis (n = 3), grounded theory (n = 1), experimental (n = 1) and quasi-experimental (n = 1) designs, eye-tracking (n = 1), discourse-historical approach (n = 1), constant comparative analysis (n =1), and topic modeling (n = 1). One study did not specify the method used.

Database

Most studies (n = 27) analyzed Instagram usage and its effects by individual politicians. The remaining investigated political parties (n = 4), government ministries or projects (n = 2), or multiple type of actors (n = 3). There were n = 13 case studies focusing on a single actor. Most studies (n = 27) focused exclusively on Instagram. The majority of studies analyzing Instagram content used the profiles as selection criteria (n = 34), one study used hashtags. The dominant sample type were posts (image and caption) (n = 27), followed by captions only (n = 3), digital trace data (n = 3), as well as images only (n = 1), or sentences within a caption (n = 1). Nine studies explicitly included moving images in their sample. Several researchers included comments (n = 14) and likes (n = 12) as indicators of user engagement in their analyses. Most studies (n = 19) analyzed both image and captions as equal parts of a post; n = 10 studies primarily focused on the image and considered captions as context (n = 8). One study did not analyze captions, and another study did not specify how it proceeded with captions (n = 1). Four studies analyzed captions only, and n = 2 neither analyzed image or text, but digital trace data. Neither Instagram stories nor IGTV channels were analyzed. The n = 2 studies that applied experimental or quasi-experimental designs to assess the effects of politicians Instagram communication used student samples (N = 120 and N = 20, respectively).

Theoretical Concepts

When reviewing the studies, it became apparent that they draw on a wide range of theoretical concepts. A total of n = 28 studies explicitly referred to a theory. One study was based on the broad concept of strategic communication to combine several sub-concepts, such as image management or mobilization (Russmann et al., 2019).

A study conducting user analysis explicitly anchored it in a theory related to the question of which political actors adopt and dominate social media platforms (Larsson, 2017b): equalization and normalization hypotheses were drawn upon to gain insight into whether established or smaller actors dominate on Instagram.

The majority of theoretical concepts was located in the area of self-presentation. Two studies referred to political storytelling (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Mohamed, 2019). The concept describes the strategic communication of stories about the politicians themselves as a form of self-presentation (e.g., by communicating references to a politicians' family background or past; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Mohamed, 2019). One study drew on the concept of political narratives (Dobkiewicz, 2019), which extend to stories beyond the politician. Following Somers' (1994) model of narrativity,

Dobkiewicz (2019) analyzed not only personal ontological narratives but also public narratives (i.e., stories shared by larger groups) and metanarratives (i.e., grand, boundary-crossing stories). For instance, the author identified Trump's story of a 'great America' as a public narrative.

Several studies address the concept of image management (also called image-making; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017, or impression management; Jung et al., 2017). Most authors define image management similarly despite the different terms: as a strategic construction of symbolism through visual and verbal messages with the aim of conveying certain characteristics of an individual or political object to the audience (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017) or, more broadly, efforts to create and improve their perceptions (Grusell & Nord, 2020; Jung et al., 2017; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019; Russmann et al., 2019). Moreover, there is consensus on the definition of personalization: a two-dimensional concept, consisting of individualization (i.e., a shift in focus to politicians instead of parties) and privatization (i.e., a shift in focus to non-political traits and the private live; Farkas & Bene, 2020; Grusell & Nord, 2020; Jung et al., 2017; Larsson, 2017a; Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019; Russmann et al., 2019).

In reviewing the studies, it became apparent that image management and personalization are closely related theoretical concepts, but that their relationship is understood differently. Some authors analyzing politicians Instagram communication and its' effects treat personalization as one available communication strategy on its own (Farkas & Bene, 2020). Other studies address personalization either alongside with (Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019), or within the concept of communication image-making (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017), image management (Grusell & Nord, 2020), or impression management (Jung et al., 2017). The only study addressing image management in the context of political parties operationalized the concept entirely as personalization (i.e., a focus on the top candidate) and privatization (i.e., weather a candidate is presented in a professional or private context; Russmann et al., 2019). And yet others independently analyzed the effect of personalization on attention gain online (Larsson, 2017a) without reference to image management.

Further applied theoretical concepts in the field of self-presentation and its effects were self-presentation (Steffan, 2020) or self-personalization as such (Lindholm et al., 2020), celebritization (Ekman & Widholm, 2017), mediatization (Ekman & Widholm, 2017), visual framing (Holiday et al., 2015; Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Steffan, 2020), performed authenticity (Rodina & Dligach, 2019), and charismatic engagement (Abidin, 2017). O'Connell (2020) built on the concept of parasocial interaction can explain the nature of the relationship between a politician and her or his Instagram followers. He argues that the bond grows stronger if the politician offers glimpses of her or his private life.

Several of the studies drawing on theoretical concepts from the field of self-presentation simultaneously linked them to the communication of political issues or campaign issues (Dobkiewicz, 2019; Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017; Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017). Other researchers drew on popular concepts from communication research to understand whether and how politicians use Instagram to communicate political issues: the (rhetorical) framing theory (Nespoli, 2019) was used to explain the way in which politicians present political issues on their accounts. Hegemony theory was applied to investigate Instagram usage by an autocratic leader (Avedissian, 2016). Ludwig (2017) drew on issue ownership theory to analyze whether Democrats and Republicans communicated issues associated with their parties.

One study (Russmann & Svensson, 2017) contributed to the concept of political deliberation) to enhance our understanding of interaction between political actors and users. Similarly, Gruzd et al. (2018) applied a theory relating to citizens' communication. The authors used the concept of civic engagement to investigate the interaction of a government account with its followers. Svensson et al. (2020) drew on the theory of direct representation to understand how political parties use Instagram outside of election periods and if they interact with the electorate.

Studies on Instagram that explicitly ground their research in populism theory are rare, although social media platforms are often the object of research that analyzes populism from a communication perspective (e.g., Engesser et al., 2017; Ernst et al., 2017). Dobkiewicz (2019) drew on Mudde's (2004) definition of populism as a thin ideology in assessing Trumps Instagram narratives. Mendonça and Caetano (2020) and Rodina and Dligach (2019) based their study in populism theory with a focus on the communicative dimension.

Regarding the effects of political actors' Instagram usage, agenda-setting theory (Towner & Muñoz, 2018) was applied as a framework to analyze if political issues communicated by politicians on Instagram influence traditional media's agenda.

Conclusion

This review was motivated by the growing popularity of Instagram among political actors, reflected in an increase in research from a variety of disciplines. It set out to gather substantiated knowledge and detect research gaps regarding three key areas of Instagram usage of politicians, parties, and government representatives: who uses Instagram, how do they use it, and with what effect? The review has demonstrated that the existing studies provide valuable early findings and points of departure for further research, although research on Instagram is still underdeveloped in comparison to other social media platforms.

Main Findings

Overall, political actors seem to use Instagram to create a favorable, positive image rather than to reflect on policy issues, engage in direct interaction with citizens, or mobilize voters. The majority of political actors' posts depict themselves, or—in the case of posts published on accounts of political parties—images of their top candidate. Portrayals emphasizing a statesmanlike or professional image dominate. Thus, one dimension of the personalization hypothesis – individualization (Adam & Maier, 2010) – seems to be confirmed on the platform. Yet although Instagram is a platform that encourages the dissemination of private insights (Schill & Hendricks, 2018), glimpses of politicians' private lives are shared less often than professional images (e.g., Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Ghazali et al., 2019; O'Connell, 2018; Russmann et al., 2019), with the exception of a far-right politician (Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). Nonetheless, there is evidence that pictures of family members are posted more often on Instagram than on Facebook, while it is the other way around for posts including political issues (Farkas & Bene, 2020). Thus, the platform may mirror privatization tendencies, the second dimension of personalization (Adam & Maier, 2010), but to a relatively low degree. A recurring strategy seems to be the combination of political information with private aspects, for example, framing issues in a private setting (Rodina & Dligach, 2019). This is consistent with observations that political images and issues are increasingly difficult to distinguish in political advertising (Kaid, 2004). Yet, there is a lack of reliable indications as to which actors are more likely to stage themselves in a private context, and when. Some studies found that members of center-right or far-right parties post more non-political content than others, including images of their family (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; O'Connell, 2018). In contrast, parties further to the left (Democrats and Greens) seem to communicate more issues (Ekman & Widholm, 2017; Ludwig, 2017; Towner & Muñoz, 2018).

In addition to party affiliation, there is evidence that individual characteristics of political actors, such as their gender or age, influence their Instagram communication. For example, women seem to be more likely to have an Instagram and to post more selfies in closer shots, whereas gender does not impact the amount of non-political content shared on the platform (O'Connell, 2018). Regarding age, there is evidence that younger politicians post more selfies and more images of their family (O'Connell, 2018), suggesting that they may be more inclined to adapt to platform-conventions.

Moreover, Instagram does not seem to meet expectations of fostering a dialogue between political actors and citizens, although a high level of interaction may have a positive effect on voters' perception of their character (Jung et al., 2017). The level of interaction varies greatly between political actors, but no clear patterns have been established yet.

In addition to the question of the manner of usage, political communication in social media is also accompanied by a debate as to whether the platforms tend to benefit established or smaller political actors (e.g., Klinger, 2013; Larsson, 2017b). The findings on that issue are yet inconclusive. One study exploring the type of users active on Instagram found that although both larger and smaller actors are active on Instagram, the former are dominant (Larsson, 2017b). Other findings showed that new parties are more active and have more followers (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Another study suggested that existing power structures are reinforced on Instagram, because politicians who are powerful in the real world also have more followers on the platform. Content has little influence on this but rather has an effect on engagement (O'Connell, 2020). One reason for this is probably that opportunities to come across a politician who is not yet known to the user are severely limited on Instagram. For example, there is no built-in tool that allows users to publicly share another users' posts as easily as on similar platforms (O'Connell, 2020). Against this backdrop, Instagram may be better suited to cultivating an image among people who already know a political actor rather than attracting new supporters.

When it comes to Instagram effects, our knowledge of

whether political actors' self-presentation efforts are successful is still quite limited. There are indications that certain strategies, such as personal content (Larsson, 2020; O'Connell, 2020; but see Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019), or mobilizing efforts (Russmann & Svensson, 2017; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019) have a positive effect on user engagement on the platform. But we still know little about how such strategies affect voters' perceptions of political actors. Evidence suggests that providing glimpses of one' s private life versus professional images has a negative impact on the evaluation of a politician' s character (Jung et al., 2017). Other aspects are vastly under-researched. For instance, does a strategy that creates a professional and statesmanlike image lead to a higher level of perceived competence for office? And is this effect possibly influenced by the perceived authenticity of the message, the politicians' gender, or is it limited to users who were already sympathetic to the politician in question? Of course, Instagram effects are not isolated from general social media effects. However, the platform's visual focus highlights the importance of studies addressing the effect of visual social media communication on the perception and evaluation of politicians.

Comparing these findings to those of a similar literature review focusing on Twitter use in election campaigns (Jungherr, 2016), some similarities regarding manners of usage become apparent. Political actors only rarely use the platforms to interact with citizens, but there is a high level of variation between individual actors. In the case of Twitter, it seems that politicians of parties in the opposition or a challenger position are more prone to interact with other users (Jungherr, 2016). Similarly, there is evidence that a party not represented in parliament uses Instagram more interactively (Russmann & Svensson, 2017). Moreover, the level of posts addressing policy issues or mobilizing voters seems to be relatively low on both Instagram and Twitter (Jungherr, 2016). Overall, Twitter seems to be mainly used to disseminate information (e.g., regarding campaign activities) – a manner of usage that can also be found on Instagram. But what appears to differentiate Instagram from Twitter is its use to create a positive image, which doesn't seem to be of much relevance on Twitter (Jungherr, 2016). This fits with findings from studies in this review comparing Instagram to Twitter. They found that Instagram is the preferred outlet for informal content whereas Twitter and Facebook are used as primary communication channels and to disseminate information (Ghazali et al., 2019; Gruzd et al., 2018). These findings suggest that political actors adapt their communication to the specific social media outlet. Instagram, possibly due to its visual focus and informal platform environment (Schill & Hendricks, 2018), seems to be the preferred option for self-presentation.

Methodological Challenges

Overall, Instagram is less understood than other social media platforms such as Twitter (Jungherr, 2016), even though it attracts more users (Statista, 2020a). One reason for the comparatively few studies could be that access to Instagram data is more complicated than to Twitter due to restrictions to the Instagram API (Constine, 2018). Moreover, Instagram is methodically challenging due to its multimodal character. In the context of this review, several points can be noted that made it at times difficult to examine the studies and evaluate their findings. First, the theoretical part of the studies sometimes lacked precision: central constructs, such as private content, were not defined, or the underlying theoretical basis was not clearly stated. Second, in some cases, necessary information on the databases was missing, such as the number of Instagram posts studied or whether all published posts in a specified time period were examined. Third, studies that conducted a content analysis sometimes lacked necessary information, such as the unit of analysis or reliability measures. In addition, the categories of the content analysis were sometimes not described transparently. Fourth, the result reports sometimes lacked information necessary to assess the findings, such as relative or absolute frequencies for individual categories. Fifth, in rare cases, categories of a content analysis that were previously described as central to the study were no longer reported in the results section – or categories were reported that had not been mentioned before. To ensure that findings on political use of Instagram are comprehensible and comparable, future studies should report both methods and results as transparently as possible. Similarly, future studies should provide precise and coherent definitions of the concepts and contents analyzed.

Opportunities for Future Research

This review has shown that there are still major research gaps regarding the use of Instagram by political actors, for instance, a lack of comparisons across countries, different types

of actors, and both campaign and non-election periods. However, the existing studies offer deep and valuable insights into political actors' Instagram use. Against this background, there are opportunities for further research: First, more systematic comparisons are needed. This would require comparisons of a large group of political actors with different characteristics, for example, gender, party size, or political spectrum, in different contexts such as various countries or election- and non-election periods. Second, more longitudinal studies (Russmann et al., 2019) would be beneficial to investigate indications of changes in political communication, for instance, a personalization trend. For instance, there is early evidence that parties may adapt their strategies on Instagram over time (Russmann et al., 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). Third, future research should be built systematically on the available literature and systematically validate its findings in various contexts to establish a more interconnected body of research (Jungherr, 2016). To this end, studies that transfer established analytical concepts to other contexts (Muñoz & Towner, 2017; Steffan, 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019) can help to build solid evidence. Related to this, future studies could align central concepts with the definitions used in previous studies to improve comparability. For example, popular concepts such as selfies or non-political content should be based on a common understanding. Fourth, adequate analysis of political Instagram usage demands methods beyond the common tools used for textual media, increasing the need for visual methods and interdisciplinary approaches. The variety of both visual and textual content must be considered. Hence, the increasing necessity of multimodality in communication research (von Sikorski & Brantner, 2018) becomes evident in the case of Instagram. Moreover, the use of certain Instagram features by politicians, parties, or governments, such as stories, live videos, or reels, has not yet been sufficiently explored. Stories, for example, are becoming increasingly popular (Statista, 2019). In addition, stories and videos open up new possibilities for political storytelling and interaction, as they allow to ask viewers' questions or to directly react to user questions during a livestream (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019). Thus, they may be a powerful tool to increase direct contact between political actors and Instagram users. For example, the U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez recently talked about her experience during the attack on the U.S. Capitol in a livestream on her Instagram account. The video attracted a lot of attention – both on Instagram with almost six million views (Ocasio-Cortez, 2018) and as an echo in newspapers (e.g., Astor, 2021; Evelyn, 2021). Fifth, there is great potential for qualitative research on Instagram. The existing qualitative or mixed-methods studies have demonstrated how in-depth analyses of Instagram content can enhance our knowledge of how political actors use Instagram. A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods can help to understand communication patterns and relevant visual and textual content and techniques in a broad and in-depth way, particularly given the multimodality of the medium. Sixth, there is a need for effects studies, especially experimental designs. The existing studies that analyze the effect of content on user engagement provide important insights into which strategies generate attention on the platform. However, there is a lack of experiments that examine the effect on users causally, for instance, on the evaluation of political actors. Moreover, the influence of external variables such as the actors' or recipients' gender, or the perceived authenticity of a message, should also be investigated.

Limitations and Final Conclusion

This review is a first step toward a systematic closure of the identified research gaps, but it comes with limitations. For one, the review focused on a specific group of political actors, namely parties, ministries and governments, and individual politicians. This allowed the findings on their Instagram use to be explored in depth. At the same time, it meant that other aspects of political Instagram use, such as civil society actors or non-governmental organizations, were not taken into account. Reviews of Instagram research by this broader group of actors, possibly also from a comparative perspective, could contribute to a better understanding of Instagram use and central concepts such as selfies or privatization in social media. Moreover, this review reduced the studies to similarities in order to explore overarching patterns; in doing so, details addressed in individual studies sometimes had to be neglected. Furthermore, the studies were difficult to compare due to their heterogeneity. Thus, the findings of this review should be understood as an indication of the state of research and relevant points of departure, which may not necessarily be stable across national contexts, types of actors, or election periods. Finally, the review considered only research in English that addressed a specific set of search terms. This may have caused relevant results in other languages or those not covered by these terms to be overlooked.

Research on the usage and effects of Instagram can significantly enhance our knowledge on political communication online, because it is used by a broad range of political actors with different cultural and political backgrounds, and offers a range of visual and textual tools. Moreover, most political actors seem to use Instagram to create a desired public image by strategically selecting content by presenting them in a certain light. Understanding these strategies can not only enhance our knowledge of (visual) political communication on social media in general, but also help us understand how political actors want to be seen and which traits or issues they want to highlight (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017). The findings and recommendations in this review can help to close research gaps and to further explore the role of Instagram as a means of political communication.

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Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments* [a] (back to text)

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
User analysis		A. F. Azmi & Budi (2018)	-	Digital trace data	Quantitative	Indonesia	Govern-ment	34	Digital trace data	Full (ts)[b]	Not Specified	General	None
		Farkas & Bene (2020)	Personalization	Content analysis	Mixed Methods	Hungary	Politician	51	Post	Full (ts)[b]	868 /629[d]	Election campaign	Facebook
		Ghazali et al. (2019)	-	Content analysis	Quantitative	Malaysia	Politician	8	Post	Full (ts)[b]	168	Election campaign	Facebook
		Grusell & Nord (2020)	Image-management & personalization	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	6	Post	Full (ts)[b]	262	Election campaign	None
		Larsson (2017a)	Personalization	Digital trace data	Quantitative	Norway	Politician & party	14	Digital trace data & post	Full	6,455	General	None
		Larsson (2017b)	Normalization & equation hypotheses	Digital trace data	Quantitative	Norway	Various	Not appli-cable	Digital trace data	Full (ts)[b]	6,380	Election campaign	Twitter
		Larsson (2020)	-	Digital trace data & descriptive Analysis	Mixed Methods	Norway	Politician & party	19	Digital trace data & post	Full (ts)[b]	588	Election campaign	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube
		Ludwig (2017)	Issue owner-ship theory	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	18	Post	Full (ts)[b]	4,341	Election campaign	None

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
		Mohamed (2019)	Political storytelling	Image type analysis	Mixed Methods	Malaysia	Politician	3	Post	Full (ts)[b]	138	Election campaign	None
		Muñoz & Towner (2017)	Visual framing	Content/ framing analysis	Mixed Methods	USA	Politician	7	Post	Various	1,552/ 157/140[c]	Election campaign	None
		Nespoli (2019)	Framing	Framing analysis	Mixed Methods	Italy	Politician	2	Caption	Not specified	1,767	Election campaign	Twitter
		O'Connell (2018)	-	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	534	Post & account	Full (ts)[b]	17,811	General	None
		O'Connell (2020)	Parasocial interaction	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	534	Post & account	Full (ts)[b]	17,811/ 16,638[f]	General	None
		Poulakidakos & Giannouli (2019)	Personaliza-tion & image management	Content analysis	Quantitative	Greece	Politician	3	Post	Full	593	General	None
		Russmann & Svensson (2017)	Deliberation	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Party	7	Post	Full/ systematic sample (ts)[b]	220	Election campaign	None
		Svensson, Russmann & Cezayirlioglu (2020)	Direct representation	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Party	3	Post	Full (ts)[b]	19	General	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
		Towner & Muñoz (2018)	Agenda-Setting	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	6	Post	Full (ts)[b]	1,444	Election campaign	None
		Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	-	Content analysis	Quantitative	Spain	Party	4	Post	Full (ts)[b]	221	Election campaign	None
Manner of usage	Self-pre-sentation	Abidin (2017)	Charismatic engagement	Not Specified	Qualitative	Singapore	Politician	1	Post	Not Specified	Not Specified	General	None
		Avedissian (2016)	Hegemony	Discourse analysis	Mixed-methods	Chechnya	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	179	General	None
		A. Azmi et al. (2018)	-	Discourse analysis	Qualitative	Indonesia	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	27	General	None
		Dobkiewicz (2019)	Political narratives / populism	Discourse-historical approach & semiotic analysis	Qualitative	USA	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	330	Election campaign	None
		Ekman & Widholm (2017)	Mediatization & celebrity politics	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	16	Post	Systematic random	800	General	None
		Farkas & Bene (2020)	Personaliza-tion	Content analysis	Mixed-methods	Hungary	Politician	51	Post	Full (ts)[b]	868 /629[d]	Election campaign	Facebook

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
		Ghazali et al. (2019)	-	Content analysis	Quantitative	Malaysia	Politician	8	Post	Full (ts)[b]	168	Election campaign	Facebook
		Grusell & Nord (2020)	Image management & personalization	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	6	Post	Full (ts)[b]	262	Election campaign	None
		Holiday, Lewis & LaBaugh (2015)	Visual framing	Constant comparative analysis & grounded theory	Mixed Methods	Syria	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	147	General	None
		Lalancette & Raynauld (2017)	Image-making & personalization	Content analysis	Mixed Methods	Canada	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	145	General	None
		Liebhart & Bernhardt (2017)	Political storytelling	Image type analysis	Mixed Methods	Austria	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	504	Election campaign	
		Mendonça & Caetano (2020)	Populism & populist communication	Content analysis & descriptive analysis	Mixed Methods	Brazil	Politician	1	Image	Systematic selection	405/7[e]	General	
		Mohamed (2019)	Political Storytelling	Image type analysis	Mixed Methods	Malaysia	Politician	3	Post	Full (ts)[b]	138	Election campaign	None

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
		Muñoz & Towner (2017)	Visual Framing	Content/ framing analysis	Mixed Methods	USA	Politician	7	Post	Various	1,552/ 157/140[c]	Election campaign	None
		O'Connell (2018)	-	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	534	Post & account	Full (ts)[b]	17,811	General	None
		Poulakidakos & Giannouli (2019)	Personalization & image management	Content analysis	Quantitative	Greece	Politician	3	Post	Full	593	General	None
		Rodina & Dligach (2019)	Populist discourse & performed authenticity	Topic modeling	Quantitative	Chechnya	Politician	1	Caption	Full	6,854	General	None
		Russmann, Svensson & Larsson (2019)	Strategic communication	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden & Norway	Party	15	Post	Full (ts)[b]	422	Election campaign	None
		Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo (2020)	-	Content analysis & semiotic analysis	Quantitative	Spain	Politician	1	Post	Systematic selection	259	General	None
		Steffan (2020)	Self-presenta-tion & visual framing	Content/ framing analysis	Quantitative	Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Norway, UK, USA	Politician	14	Post	Full (ts)[b]	438	Election campaign	Facebook, Twitter

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
		Susetya et al. (2020)	-	Descriptive & multimodal analysis	Qualitative	Indonesia	Politician	1	Post	Systematic selection	2	Election campaign	None
		Svensson, Russmann & Cezayirlioglu (2020)	Direct representation	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Party	3	Post	Full (ts)[b]	19	General	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube
		Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	-	Content analysis	Quantitative	Spain	Party	4	Post	Full (ts)[b]	221	Election campaign	None
	Political issues	Avedissian (2016)	Hegemony	Discourse analysis	Mixed Methods	Chechnya	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	179	General	None
		Dobkiewicz (2019)	Political narratives/populism	Discourse-historical approach & semiotic analysis	Qualitative	USA	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	330	Election campaign	None
		Ekman & Widholm (2017)	Mediatization & celebrity politics	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	16	Post	Systematic random	800	General	None
		Farkas & Bene (2020)	Personalization	Content analysis	Mixed Methods	Hungary	Politician	51	Post	Full (ts)[b]	868 /629[d]	Election campaign	Facebook

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
		Lalancette & Raynauld (2017)	Image-making & personalization	Content analysis	Mixed Methods	Canada	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	145	General	None
		Liebhart & Bernhardt (2017)	Political storytelling	Image type analysis	Mixed Methods	Austria	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	504	Election campaign	None
		Ludwig (2017)	Issue Ownership theory	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	18	Post	Full (ts)[b]	4,341	Election campaign	None
		Nespoli (2019)	Framing	Framing analysis	Mixed Methods	Italy	Politician	2	Caption	Not specified	1767	Election campaign	Twitter
		Rodina & Dligach (2019)	Populist discourse & performed authenticity	Topic modeling	Quantitative	Chechnya	Politician	1	Caption	Full	6,854	General	None
		Towner & Muñoz (2018)	Agenda-Setting	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	6	Post	Full (ts)[b]	1,444	Election campaign	None
		Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	-	Content analysis	Quantitative	Spain	Party	4	Post	Full (ts)[b]	221	Election campaign	None
	Mobilization	Liebhart & Bernhardt (2017)	Political storytelling	Image type analysis	Mixed Methods	Austria	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	504	Election campaign	None

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
		Ludwig (2017)	Issueownership theory	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	18	Post	Full (ts)[b]	4,341	Election campaign	None
		Russmann, Svensson & Larsson (2019)	Strategic Campaign communication	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden & Norway	Party	15	Post	Full (ts)[b]	422	Election campaign	None
		Svensson, Russmann & Cezayirlioglu (2020)	Direct Representation	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Party	3	Post	Full (ts)[b]	19	General	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube
		Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	-	Content analysis	Quantitative	Spain	Party	4	Post	Full (ts)[b]	221	Election campaign	None
	Interaction	Ekman & Widholm (2017)	Mediatization & celebrity politics	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	16	Post	Systematic random	800	General	None
		Gruzd et al. (2018)	Civic Engagement	Content analysis	Mixed Methods	Canada	Government	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	248	General	Twitter
		Russmann & Svensson (2017)	Deliberation	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Party	7	Post	Full/ systematic sample (ts)[b]	220	Election campaign	None
		Svensson, Russmann & Cezayirlioglu (2020)	Direct Representation	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Party	3	Post	Full (ts)[b]	19	General	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
	Campaign information	Farkas & Bene (2020)	Personalization	Content Analysis	Mixed Methods	Hungary	Politician	51	Post	Full (ts)[b]	868 / 629[d]	Election campaign	Facebook
		Ghazali et al. (2019)	-	Content Analysis	Quantitative	Malaysia	Politician	8	Post	Full (ts)[b]	168	Election campaign	Facebook
		Liebhart & Bernhardt (2017)	Political storytelling	Image Type Analysis	Mixed Methods	Austria	Politician	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	504	Election campaign	None
		Ludwig (2017)	Issue Ownership theory	Content Analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	18	Post	Full (ts)[b]	4,341	Election campaign	None
		Mohamed (2019)	Political Storytelling	Image Type Analysis	Mixed Methods	Malaysia	Politician	3	Post	Full (ts)[b]	138	Election campaign	None
		Poulakidakos & Giannouli (2019)	Personalization & image management	Content Analysis	Quantitative	Greece	Politician	3	Post	Full	593	General	None
		Roosinda & Pamuji (2018)	-	Descriptive Analysis	Qualitative	Indonesia	Politician	2	Post	Not Specified	Not Specified	Election campaign	None
	Additional findings: effective sentence	Oktarina & Ermanto (2019)	Effectiveness sentence	Descriptive Analysis	Qualitative	Indonesia	Politician	1	Sentences	Strategic selection	73	Not Specified	None

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
	Additional findings: references to other media	Ekman & Widholm (2017)	Mediatization & celebrity politics	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	16	Post	Systematic random	800	General	None
		Grusell & Nord (2020)	Image management & personalization	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	6	Post	Full (ts)[b]	262	Election campaign	None
		Russmann, Svensson & Larsson (2019)	Strategic communication	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden & Norway	Party	15	Post	Full (ts)[b]	422	Election campaign	None
Effects	On users	Abidin (2017)	Charismatic engagement	Not Specified	Qualitative	Singapore	Politician	1	Post	Not Specified	Not Specified	General	None
		A. F. Azmi & Budi (2018)	-	Digital trace data	Quantitative	Indonesia	Government	34	Digital trace data	Full (ts)[b]	Not Specified	General	None
		A. F. Azmi & Budi (2018)	-	Digital trace data	Quantitative	Indonesia	Government	34	Digital trace data	Full (ts)[b]	Not Specified	General	None
		Ekman & Widholm (2017)	Mediatization & celebrity politics	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	16	Post	Systematic random	800	General	None

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
		Farkas & Bene (2020)	Personalization	Content analysis	Mixed Methods	Hungary	Politician	51	Post	Full (ts)[b]	868 /629[d]	Election campaign	Facebook
		Gruzd et al. (2018)	Civic Engagement	Content analysis	Mixed Methods	Canada	Govern-ment	1	Post	Full (ts)[b]	248	General	Twitter
		Jung et al. (2017)	Impression management & personalization	Experiment	Quantitative	Singapore	Politician	Not Applicable	Student sample	-	120	Not Applicable	None
		Larsson (2017a)	Personalization	Digital trace data	Quantitative	Norway	Politician & party	14	Digital trace data & post	Full	6,455	General	None
		Larsson (2020)	-	Digital trace data & Descriptive analysis	Mixed Methods	Norway	Politician & party	19	Digital trace data & post	Full (ts)[b]	588	Election campaign	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube
		Lindholm, Carlson & Högväg (2020)	Self-personalization	Quasi-experiment	Quantitative	Finland	Politician	Not Applicable	Student sample	-	32	Not Applicable	None
		Muñoz & Towner (2017)	Visual Framing	Content/ framing analysis	Mixed Methods	USA	Politician	7	Post	Various	1,552/ 157/140[c]	Election campaign	None

Table 1. *Studies on Instagram use by Politicians, Parties, and Governments*

Top-level category	Sub-level category	Study	Theory	Method	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Type of sample	Sampling design	Sample size	Context	Compared platforms
		Nespoli (2019)	Framing	Framing analysis	Mixed Methods	Italy	Politician	2	Caption	Not specified	1767	Election campaign	Twitter
		O'Connell (2020)	Parasocial interaction	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	534	Post & account	Full (ts)[b]	17,811/ 16,638[F]	General	None
		Russmann & Svensson (2017)	Deliberation	Content analysis	Quantitative	Sweden	Party	7	Post	Full/ systematic sample (ts)	220	Election campaign	None
		Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	-	Content analysis	Quantitative	Spain	Party	4	Post	Full (ts)[b]	221	Election campaign	None
	On media agenda	Abidin (2017)	Charismatic engagement	Not Specified	Qualitative	Singapore	Politician	1	Post	Not Specified	Not Specified	General	None
		Towner & Muñoz (2018)	Agenda-Setting	Content analysis	Quantitative	USA	Politician	6	Post	Full (ts)[b]	1,444	Election campaign	None

Note. a) All information refers to analyses of Instagram, even if other media were examined. For example, 'sample size' only specifies the size of the Instagram sample
b) full sample regarding specific time span and focus of the study (for example, if a study focused on still images and therefore analyzed all posts except those with videos in the specified period; this was also noted as 'full in timespan')
c) smaller samples: random sample for framing analysis (n = 157); top ten engaged posts analyzed for user effects (n = 140)
d) smaller sample: for the analysis of effects, images with 'meaningful caption' were excluded; n = 868 in abstract, n = 858 in method section
e) 405 images coded to offer an overview, 7 qualitatively analyzed (main focus of study)
f) smaller sample: videos were removed for analysis of effects on likes and comments.

Table 2. *Studies analyzing non-political content in political actors' Instagram usage* (back to text)

Operationalization of non-political content	Study	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Sample size	Context	Central findings
Posts relating to everyday/personal lives of political actors or images depicting them in a private context (content that is not related to the political or professional role of the actor)	Ekman & Widholm (2017)	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	16	800	General	*General:* Swedish politicians: personal content = 33%. *Party affiliation:* far-right politicians communicate highly privatized.
	O'Connell (2018)	Quantitative	USA	Politician	534	17,811 / 16,638	General	*General:* members of U.S. Congress: personal content = 8%. *Gender:* does not determine the amount of personal content. *Party affiliation:* republicans are more likely to post personal (but also professional) content. *Political role:* senators are more likely to post personal content.
	Poulakidakos & Giannouli (2019)	Quantitative	Greece	Politician	3	593	General	*General:* share of personal content ranges from 18% to 39%. *Party affiliation:* leader of conservative party has highest share of personal (39%) and private (22%) posts.
	Russmann, Svensson & Larsson (2019)	Quantitative	Sweden & Norway	Party	15	422	Election campaign	*General:* less personal than professional content. *Country:* Norwegian parties (2017) posted more personal content than Swedish parties (2014).
Personal activities, e.g., pictures of pets, food, or daily routines; throwback posts; family	Ghazali et al. (2019)	Quantitative	Malaysia	Politician	8	168	Election campaign	*General:* personal activities = 6%.
	Mohamed (2019)	Mixed methods	Malaysia	Politician	3	138	Election campaign	*General:* personal activities = 17%, throwbacks = 2%.

Table 2. *Studies analyzing non-political content in political actors' Instagram usage*

Operationalization of non-political content	Study	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Sample size	Context	Central findings
Everyday private life images	Grusell & Nord (2020)	Quantitative	Sweden	Politician	6	262	Election campaign	*General:* everyday private life images = 4%, everyday professional mode prevails (96%).
Images of leisure time, references to leisure time or sports	Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo (2020)	Quantitative	Spain	Politician	1	259	General	*General:* leisure time images = 29%, which is more than the share of images emphasizing political role (24%); textual references to leisure time = 14%, textual references to sports = 10%. *Form:* non-political content is more often in images than through text.
Informal visual content (e.g., selfies, personal life, casual clothing, popular culture, or spontaneous shots)	Farkas & Bene (2020)	Mixed methods	Hungary	Politician	51	868/629	Election campaign	*General:* the share of informal content categories on Instagram ranges from 2% (popular culture) to 50% (spontaneous shots). *Platform:* Instagram used more to distribute informal visual content than Facebook.
Background stories: images emphasizing a politician's personal or private side, personal attributes, or her/his biographical background	Liebhart & Bernhardt (2017)	Mixed methods	Austria	Politician	1	504	Election campaign	*General:* background stories = 11%; part of a biographical strategy. *Strategy:* background stories emphasize a "homeland" motif, a key element of the overall campaign.
Automated classification of personal topics: well-wishes, family and children, friendship, nature, sports: boxing, sports: football, sports: equestrianism	Rodina & Dligach (2019)	Quantitative	Chechnya	Politician	1	6,854	General	*General:* the combination of professional content and personal anecdotes. *Form:* combination occurs within (the caption of) a single post.
Inductive content analysis: politician at the gym; references to politician' own and his family's connection to Islam	Avedissian (2016)	Mixed methods	Chechnya	Politician	1	179	General	*Strategy:* efforts to promote traditional Islam through tying himself and his family to it; creation of strong, masculine leader image through sports.

Table 2. *Studies analyzing non-political content in political actors' Instagram usage*

Operationalization of non-political content	Study	Type of research	Country	Type of actor	Number of actors	Sample size	Context	Central findings
As part of "populist cam-paigner" frame (ordinari-ness): informal attire, casual dress, athletic clothing, physical activity	Muñoz & Towner, 2017	Mixed methods	USA	Politician	7	1,552/ 157/140	Election campaign	*General:* informal attire and casual dress infrequently used; athletic clothing and physical activity not present
	Steffan, 2020	Quantitative	Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Norway, UK, USA	Politician	14	438	Election campaign	*General:* infrequently used
Qualitative analysis (no deductive operationalization)	Lalancette & Raynauld (2017)	Mixed methods	Canada	Politician	1	145	General	*General:* little emphasis on private life; non-private posts still convey personal feeling through structure and composition

Note. The aspect of family life is only included for those studies that did not analyze this issue individually; for more information on the study designs, please refer to Table 1.

Table 3. *Studies on Effects of Instagram Use by Political Actors* (back to text p.207) (back to text p.208)

Scope	Characteristic/ Independent variable	Study	Dependent variable	Experimental	Analysis	Test of significance	Findings
Effects on users: content-related factors	Broadcasting (posts transmitting information, e.g., stances or facts)	Russmann & Svensson (2017)	Comments	No	Comparison of frequencies	Yes	No effect
	Political issues	Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	2015: Negative effect; 2016: no effect; 2015 and 2016 (pooled model): negative effect
	Branding material	Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	No effect
	Europeanisation (reference to the EU)	Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	2015: Positive effect; 2016: no effect; 2015 and 2016 (pooled model): no effect
	Frequency of posts	A. F. Azmi & Budi (2018)	Likes + comments (x2)	No	Comparison of frequencies	No	No effect
	Image characteristics (general)	Russmann & Svensson (2017)	Intrinsic value of comments	No	Comparison of frequencies	Yes	No effect

Table 3. *Studies on Effects of Instagram Use by Political Actors*

Scope	Characteristic/ Independent variable	Study	Dependent variable	Experimental	Analysis	Test of significance	Findings
	Image characteristics (general)	Russmann & Svensson (2017)	Intrinsic value of caption	No	Comparison of frequencies	Yes	Negative effect if posts are not mobilizing, personalized, or a snapshot
	Image characteristics (general)	Larsson (2020)	Likes + comments	No	Assessment of characteristics of posts with highest engagement rates	No	Posts showing a party leader backstage have high engagement rates.
	Interactivity	Jung et al. (2017)	Perception of character	Yes	ANOVA	Yes	Positive effect
		Jung et al. (2017)	Voting intention	Yes	ANOVA	Yes	No effect
	Mobilization	Russmann & Svensson (2017)	Comments	No	Comparison of frequencies	Yes	Positive effect
		Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	Positive effect
	References to other media	Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	2015: Negative effect; 2016: no effect; 2015 and 2016 (pooled model): no effect

Table 3. *Studies on Effects of Instagram Use by Political Actors*

Scope	Characteristic/ Independent variable	Study	Dependent variable	Experimental	Analysis	Test of significance	Findings
	Self-presentation (visual framing)	Muñoz & Towner (2017)	Likes (top 10 engaged posts)	No	Analysis of most liked posts	No	The images with the highest number of likes belonged to the ideal candidate frame.
		Muñoz & Towner (2017)	Comments (top 10 engaged posts)	No	Analysis of most commented posts	No	The images with the highest number of comments belonged to the ideal candidate frame
	Self-presentation: endorsement (celebrities)	Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	No effect
	Self-presentation: personalization (posts depicting the political actor)	Farkas & Bene (2020)	Likes	No	Regression analysis	Yes	Positive effect
	Self-presentation: personalization (posts depicting a parties' top candidate)	Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	2015: Positive effect; 2016: no effect; 2015 and 2016 (pooled model): positive effect
	Self-presentation: personalization (posts carried by one or more single individual(s))	Russmann & Svensson (2017)	Comments	No	Comparison of frequencies	Yes	Negative effect

Table 3. *Studies on Effects of Instagram Use by Political Actors*

Scope	Characteristic/ Independent variable	Study	Dependent variable	Experimental	Analysis	Test of significance	Findings
	Self-presentation (selfies)	Abidin (2017)	Popularity	No	Qualitative comparison	No	Positive effect
	Self-presentation (selfies)	Ekman & Widholm (2017)	Likes + comments	No	Comparison of means	No	Positive effect
Self-presentation: political vs. Non-political content	Formal vs. Informal	Farkas & Bene (2020)	Likes	No	Regression analysis	Yes	Formal: no effect, informal: mostly no effect, exceptions are family members (positive) and spontaneous shots (negative)
	Personal image	O`Connel (2020)	Comments	No	Regression analysis	Yes	Positive effect
	Personal image	O`Connel (2020)	Likes	No	Regression analysis	Yes	Positive effect
	Professional vs. Private	Jung et al. (2017)	Perception of character	Yes	ANOVA	Yes	Professional images lead to more positive perception of character than private images
	Professional vs. Private	Jung et al. (2017)	Voting intention	Yes	ANOVA	Yes	No difference

Table 3. *Studies on Effects of Instagram Use by Political Actors*

Scope	Characteristic/ Independent variable	Study	Dependent variable	Experimental	Analysis	Test of significance	Findings
	Private image	Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	2015: No effect; 2016: negative effect; 2015 and 2016 (pooled model): negative effect
	Self-presentation: selfie and snapshot vs. Official context	Russmann & Svensson (2017)	Comments	No	Comparison of frequencies	No	Selfie and snapshots: negative effect
	Type of post: photo vs. Video	A. F. Azmi & Budi (2018)	Likes + comments (x2)	No	Comparison of frequencies	No	No overall effect; photos receive more likes, videos more comments
Effects on users: external and individual factors	Party: leftwing	Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	2015: Negative effect; 2016: positive effect; 2015 and 2016 (pooled model): no effect
	Party: new	Turnbull-Dugarte (2019)	Likes + comments (x2)[b]	No	Regression analysis	Yes	2015: Positive effect; 2016: no effect; 2015 and 2016 (pooled model): positive effect
	Personalization: party accounts vs. Party leaders accounts	Larsson (2017a)	Likes	No	Comparison of means	Yes	Party leaders: mostly more likes

Table 3. *Studies on Effects of Instagram Use by Political Actors*

Scope	Characteristic/ Independent variable	Study	Dependent variable	Experi-mental	Analysis	Test of significance	Findings
		Larsson (2017a)	Comments	No	Comparison of means	Yes	Party leaders: mostly more comments
	Political actor: importance in real life / real world influence	O`Connel (2020)	Follower count	No	Regression analysis	Yes	Positive effect
	Political actor: Matteo Salvini vs. Luigi Di Maio	Nespoli (2019)	Likes	No	Comparison of relative frequencies (average per post)	No	All posts: Salvini receives more likes posts on Labour issues: Di Maio receives more likes
	Political actor: Matteo Salvini vs. Luigi Di Maio	Nespoli (2019)	Comments	No	Comparison of relative frequencies (average per post)	No	All posts: Salvini receives more comments; posts on Labour issues: Di Maio receives more comments
	Political actor: smaller vs. larger parties (and their leaders)	Larsson (2020)	Likes + com-ments	No	Assessment of characteristics of posts with highest engagement rates	No	Leaders from smaller parties receive relatively high engagement rates (similar to those of large parties)

Table 3. *Studies on Effects of Instagram Use by Political Actors*

Scope	Characteristic/ Independent variable	Study	Dependent variable	Experimental	Analysis	Test of significance	Findings
Effects on users: content-related & individual factors	Self-presentation: professional vs. private & gender of politician	Lindholm, Carlson & Högväg (2020)	Attention Distribution (Fixation duration in seconds)	Quasi	Mann–Whitney U test	Yes	Professional posts: caption attention longer; private posts: draw attention to face, especially for female politician professional posts: positive effect on perceptions of personal character is stronger for male politician; positive effect on perception of competence only for male politician; private posts: positive effect on perception of character for female politician only
		Lindholm, Carlson & Högväg (2020)	Perception of character Perception of competence	Quasi	Mann–Whitney U test	Yes	
Effects on users: other factors	Platform affordances (Instagram vs. Twitter)	Gruzd et al. (2018)	Likes (normalized by number of followers)	No	Comparison of means	Yes	Instagram: more likes than on Twitter
		Gruzd et al. (2018)	Comments (normalized by number of followers)	No	Comparison of means	Yes	Instagram: more comments than on Twitter
	Number of likes	A. F. Azmi & Budi (2018)	Comments	No	Comparison of frequencies	No	Positive effect

Table 3. *Studies on Effects of Instagram Use by Political Actors*

Scope	Characteristic/ Independent variable	Study	Dependent variable	Experimental	Analysis	Test of significance	Findings
	Political issues	Towner & Muñoz (2018)	Newspaper agenda	No	Correlation analysis	Yes	Weak effects on some issues
Effects on media agenda							
	Self-presentation (selfies)	Abidin (2017)	Popularity & media attention	No	Qualitative Comparison	No	Positive effect

Note. a) The table presents only the independent variables that are the focus of the studies (no additional control variables)
b) The study examined the effects of both the engagement score (likes and comments) and the likes on their own. The table presents only the effects of the engagement score, since it is more comprehensive.

Appendix. *Databases and search terms* (back to text)

Database	Search terms and fields	Search mode	Limitations
Academic Search Complete	Search field AB (abstract) 1: politics or politicians or political OR government OR voter OR election OR campaign AND search field AB (abstract) 2: Instagram	Boolean/phrase; apply equivalent subjects: positive; apply related words: negative; also search within the full text of the articles: positive	Publication type: all; document type: all; language: English, German
BASE	Instagram AND [politics OR politician OR candidate OR election OR "campaign" OR political OR policy OR government OR vote OR voter OR voters OR electorate]	Document type: text: book, article in book, journal article, conference contribution, report, review, manuscript, thesis: dissertation language: English, German	
Communication & Mass Media Complete	Search field AB (abstract) 1: politics or politicians or political OR government OR voter OR election OR campaign AND search field AB (abstract) 2: Instagram	Boolean/phrase; apply equivalent subjects: positive; apply related words: negative; also search within the full text of the articles: positive	Publication type: all; document type: all; language: English, German
Google Scholar	Main search field: allintitle: Instagram AND [politics OR politician OR candidate OR election OR "campaign" OR political OR policy OR government OR vote OR voter OR voters OR electorate]		Time period: 2012-2020 (platform launch); Patents included: negative; Citations included: negative
Political Science Complete	Search field AB (abstract) 1: Instagram AND search field AB (abstract) 2: politics or politicians or political OR government OR voter OR election OR campaign	Boolean/phrase; Apply equivalent subjects: positive; Apply related words: negative; Also search within the full text of the articles: positive	Publication type: all; Document type: all

Appendix. *Databases and search terms*

Database	Search terms and fields	Search mode	Limitations
ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global	Search field AB (abstract) 1: Instagram AND Search field AB (abstract) 1: politics OR politicians OR political OR government OR voter OR election OR campaign		Manuscript Type: doctoral dissertations; language: English, German
OpenDissertations	Search field AB (summary) 1: Instagram AND search field AB (summary) 2: politics or politicians or political OR government OR voter OR election OR campaign	Boolean/phrase; apply equivalent subjects: positive; apply related words: negative; also search within the full text of the articles: positive	
SSRN	Main (only) search field: Instagram AND [politics OR politician OR candidate OR election OR campaign OR political OR policy OR government OR vote OR voter OR voters OR electorate]		
Web of Sciene	Web of Sciene search field TS (topic): Instagram AND search field TS (topic): politics OR politicians OR political OR government OR voter OR election OR campaign all databases included		All databases included

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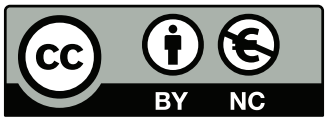

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