

# **TRUMP'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY ON INSTAGRAM: COMPUTATIONAL VISUAL AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF POSTS**

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of visual and textual political communication on Donald Trump's Instagram account from 2013 to 2021, focusing on his two election campaigns and his period as president. By employing Goffman's theory of self-representation, considering the affordances of the platform, and applying agenda-setting, framing, and online public opinion formation theories, this research aims to uncover the evolution of Trump's communication strategy. The study addresses research questions related to changes in Trump's visual and textual content based on his status, differences in communication strategies observed during election campaigns and the reflection of public interests in engagement with Trump's social media content. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques such as computational content analysis, ImageWall analysis, analysis of computer vision API outputs, network analysis, and automated textual analysis using the BERTopic model. The study illustrates how Trump strategically adapted to different roles and leveraged Instagram's features to effectively convey his desired image, engage with his audience, and shape public perception. As part of the study, a unique dataset was created, the research design, which can be used to research other politicians, political parties, and movements, was proposed, and a comprehensive analysis of Trump's communication strategy over time was conducted.

**Keywords:** Trump, Instagram, political communication, computational analysis, visual communication, textual communication, agenda-setting, visual framing, populism.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## Background and Motivation

Little do people realise how much the onset of the digital era changed the dynamics of everyday communication. Not only did the world grow smaller as a result of being ever more interconnected but the complexity of it increased exponentially as well. This occurred in huge part due to the rise in popularity of social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, among others.

Based on data from Pew Research, which surveyed over 9,200 Americans, approximately 71% of individuals now obtain at least some of their news from social media platforms (Atske, 2021). The availability of news content is one of the main reasons why users engage with social media (Khan, 2017). Since people consume political content online in the form of news, politicians react to that and publish adjacent posts on their social media, with their objective potentially being to influence or shape public opinion on a particular issue. In other words, politicians are strategically using social media platforms to share their opinions, promote their agenda, and interact with the public.

Nowadays politicians develop their communication strategies relying heavily on digital tools which allow them to construct a holistic identity and shape the desired perception of their image (Page & Duffy, 2018). Thus, social media campaigning has evolved into an essential part of modern political systems across numerous countries (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018) and those politicians who effectively leverage these tools are bound to have more success in the political arena.

An immense volume of photos is shared on Instagram daily, signifying the current era as one of “ubiquitous photography” (Hand, 2012). With Instagram emerging as an indispensable tool for politicians, political communication has progressively become centred around visual aspects. Political figures now incorporate Instagram

into their arsenal, utilising it as a platform for visual representation (Filimonov et al., 2016).

Moreover, the alteration of the communication framework within the public sphere brought about by social media has been acknowledged by scholars (Spiekermann, 2020) and this transformation has contributed to the rise of populism within the contemporary political landscape, as indicated by numerous research studies (Bast, 2021; Engesser et al., 2017; Mendonça & Caetano, 2021; Norris, 2020; Rohgalf, 2017). It is evident that populist leaders extensively employ social media as a direct and unfiltered communication channel to reach a wider audience, cultivate their populist image, mobilise supporters, and amplify divisive messages, ultimately advancing their political agendas (Dittrich, 2017). A vivid example of a populist who effectively used social media in his campaigns is Donald Trump who is described by scholars as a cultural populist, whose programme revolves around the differences between "true people" and "outsiders" (Kyle & Meyer, 2020). Consequently, a comprehensive analysis of Trump's communication strategy can provide valuable insights into the rise of populism and the role that social media plays in facilitating such movements.

Donald Trump was also selected as the primary subject of this research due to his prominence as one of the most recognised political leaders, known for his forceful personality that effectively translates into a robust political image via social media. Trump's persistent campaigning, particularly leading up to the 2016 election, brought together and mobilised his voter base, establishing a direct connection with his supporters (Panizza, 2020). During his presidency, Trump strategically employed social media platforms to meticulously cultivate and uphold his public image (Chun, 2018; Gingrich, 2017; Shear et al., 2019; Strand & Schill, 2019). In addition, social media played a pivotal role in his second election campaign as well (Elder & Lees-Marshment, 2022; Lavrov, 2022), serving as a vital channel for connecting with supporters and disseminating his campaign messages. Consequently, it is crucial to study how Trump's communication strategy evolved with the change in his status.

## Research Objectives and Research Questions

The study aims to reveal the dynamics of visual political communication on Donald Trump's Instagram account (@realdonaldtrump) from 2013 to 2021 with a specific focus on his two election campaigns and the period of his presidency. Utilising Goffman's (1956) theory of self-representation and applying it to the digital world, this research investigates Trump's communication strategy, taking into account the platform's constraints conceptualised by the theory of affordances (Bossetta, 2018; Boyd, 2011), as well as the theories of agenda-setting (Kingdon, 1995), framing (Entman, 1993; Grabe & Bucy, 2009), and public opinion formation online (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

This study will address the following research questions:

1. How did the visual and textual content of Trump evolve in response to changes in his status?
2. What are the key differences in Trump's communication strategies and content observed in Trump's election campaigns?
3. How does engagement with Trump's social media content reflect public interests?
4. In what ways did the populist framing and agenda-setting change over time with respect to Trump's communication strategy?

## Methodological Overview

This study will be carried out by integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches in the form of computational content analysis following the digital methods approach (Omena & Granado, 2020; Pearce et al., 2020; Rogers, 2013, 2021). This approach facilitates the study of the role of political communication in shaping public discourse, political behaviour, and democratic processes as it allows for uncovering of deeper meanings and implications, revealing patterns of ideology and power dynamics. Two key approaches used in this study for visual analysis are ImageWall analysis and clustering utilising computer vision APIs and network analysis. ImageWall analysis (Penn, 2000) involves systematically examining a collection of images to identify

repetitive patterns or motifs while clustering utilises computer vision techniques and algorithms to group similar photos together based on their features and similarity (Omena et al., 2021). These approaches aim to understand patterns, trends, and relationships within visual data, providing valuable insights across various fields of study. The automated textual analysis will be conducted with the use of the BERTopic model, which is a modified version of BERT (Grootendorst, 2022), for topic modelling. The goal is to analyse the captions accompanying Trump's Instagram posts to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual information provided for each image and to uncover the narratives that Trump aimed to convey through his textual content.

## **Research Gaps**

In this research, the objective is to address and bridge notable research gaps, aiming to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the extended political self of Donald Trump.

Firstly, although the analysis of textual content, especially the posts published on Twitter, has been a substantial part of the scholarship on online political communication (Colliander et al., 2017, 2017; D'heer & Verdegem, 2014; Murthy, 2015; Schmuck & Hameleers, 2020; Stier et al., 2018; van Vliet et al., 2020), only a limited amount of literature is dedicated to the analysis of politicians' visual communication strategies and the images they post online during election campaigns (Bast, 2021; Filimonov et al., 2016; Steffan, 2020).

Secondly, the study acknowledges the lack of integration between visual and textual content in previous research, therefore, it seeks to fill this gap by adopting an integrated approach that examines the interplay between visual and textual components of Trump's online communication on Instagram.

Thirdly, another research gap that this study aims to address is the limited exploration of Trump's second election campaign in 2020. By analysing the communication strategies employed during this critical period, valuable insights can be gained into the evolution of Trump's online messaging when he was both the US

President and the election candidate, and his communication strategy during this period is expected to reflect that.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the field by offering a novel data-backed framework to study populist rhetoric. While existing literature has touched upon various aspects of populist communication (De Vreese et al., 2018; Engesser et al., 2017; Schmuck & Hameleers, 2020), the integrated approach proposed in this study provides a comprehensive methodology that combines visual and textual analysis.

Finally, the proposed methodology will not only allow for a deeper understanding of Trump's communication strategy but also has the potential to be applied to analysing how political leaders and political movements use social media accounts and can be employed to compare the communication strategies of candidates and political parties during elections and referendums in any country.

## **Significance of the Study and its Outline**

This study is located at the intersection of political science, communication studies, platform studies, systems science, and data science. Its interdisciplinary nature and the variety of methods to be used will allow for filling the above-described gaps in the literature.

In the subsequent chapters, this paper will be structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review, with Chapter 3 outlining the theoretical framework which is necessary to explain the empirical part of the research. Chapter 4 is dedicated to the description of the methodology applied, both in terms of visual and textual content. Chapter 5 provides the main findings and figures derived from data analysis using machine learning techniques. Chapter 6 provides an interpretation of the results in the broader context of political communication theory and populism, linking the theoretical and empirical parts.

# Chapter 2. Literature Review

## Role of Social Media in Modern Political Communication

### *Definition and Characteristics of Social Media Platforms*

Social media platforms have revolutionised the way individuals communicate and interact in the digital age. Stating the definitions and outlining the characteristics of social media platforms is essential to understanding how they affect communication dynamics and societal trends.

According to Carr & Hayes (2015), social media platforms can be formally defined as "Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of mass personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content" (p. 49). The description emphasises several crucial features of social media platforms.

Characteristics of Social Media Platforms:

1. **Internet-Based:** One key feature of social media platforms is that they depend on the Internet to operate properly. These platforms utilise the capabilities of globally interconnected computer networks to let users connect and interact with others from anywhere in the world. Social media are not purely web-based, but the internet is the essential infrastructure that makes them function.
2. **Disentrained, Persistent Channels:** Social media platforms function as disentrained channels, allowing users to take part whenever it's convenient for them rather than requiring in-person, in-the-moment interactions. Social media platforms offer persistent channels where users can connect asynchronously, in contrast to more conventional types of communication like in-person conversations (Walther, 1996). Users can contribute to the platform's content and activities at their own pace and availability thanks to this feature.

3. Perceived participation: Differentiating across social media platforms depends heavily on perceived engagement. While other interpretations have emphasised user participation as a requirement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), Carr & Hayes (2020) contend that the sense of user interaction — even when it is not solely with other users — is crucial. The interactive aspect adds to the social nature of these platforms, whether through user interaction or interaction with digital agents and algorithms.
4. User-Generated Value: User-generated actions and content constitute the majority of the value generated by social media sites. Social media platforms rely on the contributions and interactions of their users, in contrast to traditional media channels where content is primarily produced by companies or people hosting the medium. The collaborative nature of content production, where users create, share, and interact with each other's content, fosters a feeling of community and user-driven experiences, and this is where the social value lies.
5. Social media platforms represent the idea of mass-personal communication, which is defined by the fusion of mass communication channels with interpersonal contact. Social media platforms can be used by users to interact with a substantial, frequently tailored audience. A distinctive communication dynamic results from broadcasting messages to a large audience while preserving the possibility of interpersonal responses. To engage in both mass and interpersonal communication, platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter serve as excellent examples of such spaces (Walther, et al., 2010).

The widespread daily use of social media platforms by a large number of people and their unique features have a transformative effect on politics, particularly by revolutionising political communication.

### Impact of Social Media on Politics

Economic, political, and cultural problems are amplified in large part by the Internet, particularly social media platforms. These platforms affect politics in both established democracies and authoritarian countries but in different ways. Low entrance barriers

and a focus on user-generated content are two characteristics that set social media apart from other types of media (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020).

By lowering entry barriers, previously excluded players are now allowed to participate in politics and challenge long-standing political institutions. The existing theoretical literature suggests that increased transparency and access to information could make political regimes more vulnerable and accountable (Edmond, 2013) as it is more difficult for political actors to hide potentially damaging material when there is a space for opposition voices (Sifry, 2011). Furthermore, the reputation systems that guarantee information quality in traditional media outlets may be compromised by users' ability to repost, reshare, and reproduce content created by others combined with loose fact-checking standards online (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006). As a result, false information and news may propagate, which eventually contributes to political misperceptions.

The number of news sources is also greatly increased by the low entry barriers in social media. Citizens actively engage in participatory activities such as blogging, podcasting, image sharing, and live video streaming, demonstrating their embrace of interactive practices (Porlezza, 2019). At the same time, they have greater control over how closely their news consumption matches their preexisting preferences than conventional media does, which potentially gives rise to echo chambers and deeper political polarisation (Cagé, 2020).

Social media platforms have the potential to improve coordination among people, making it simpler to plan large-scale events like street protests and even revolutions (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011) thanks to their capacity to enable communication in both directions and facilitate horizontal flows of information. However, social media protest activity may not always transfer into the massive offline actions needed for real political change in autocratic governments. This viewpoint, emphasised by Gladwell (2010), contends that the convenience of online activism could lead to a false sense of accomplishment or serve as a stand-in for on-the-ground actions that are crucial for having a real influence while opposing authoritarian regimes. Another phenomenon that has emerged in the realm of online activism is “slacktivism” (Madison & Klang, 2020), a term describing a form of low-level participation

characterised by digital actions that require minimal effort or sacrifice from individuals.

In conclusion, social media platforms have a profound impact on politics, both in democratic and autocratic political regimes. They bring both opportunities and challenges to the political landscape, offering possibilities for citizen engagement, but at the same time contributing to the dissemination of misinformation and the amplification of political polarisation.

## Reasoning behind the Use of Social Media by Politicians

Social media platforms allow politicians to bypass traditional news channels and directly engage with the public (Peng, 2021). This shift in communication dynamics has sparked an increase in interest in studying how politicians communicate on these platforms and what features make this communication effective (Bene, 2018; Metz et al., 2020), including the content of the messages, the engagement strategies employed, and the overall impact on public opinion and political discourse.

The current political media environment is undergoing a trend of professionalisation (Maarek, 2014), which entails political actors strategically developing and putting communication techniques into practice. Besides, the trend of personalisation (Russmann et al., 2019) is very apparent, as political messages are expected to be tailored to specific individuals based on their preferences and demographic characteristics. In this context, social media platforms are becoming increasingly important for politicians, especially political leaders, as they allow for the shaping of a desired public image (Dahmen, 2016; Page & Duffy, 2018), as well as a holistic identity (Gordillo-Rodríguez & Bellido-Perez, 2021), that is in line with voters' expectations in various ways.

Social media platforms assist politicians not only with portraying power, reliability, and prestige but also help them appear more approachable and relatable. This is accomplished by using these tools to strategically highlight certain aspects of their private life (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019; Page & Duffy, 2018).

## Digital Political Campaigning

In recent years, social media platforms have emerged as crucial communication channels, particularly during election campaigns (Stier et al., 2018; Vergeer, 2019). In addition to enabling users, including politicians, to produce and distribute an enormous amount of campaign-related content like pictures and texts (Bossetta & Schmökel, 2022), these platforms also become an integral component of modern political systems in various countries (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018). There is even evidence to support the hypothesis that candidates' online behaviour might significantly affect the results of national elections (Bright et al., 2020; Fujiwara et al., 2022).

During election campaigns, candidates are driven by a strong motivation to cultivate an appealing, sometimes even idealised, image of themselves and maximise their impact on voters (Steffan, 2020). Candidates are empowered to establish direct connections with people, mobilise their supporters, and shape the public agenda through popular social media platforms (Stier et al., 2018). In the context of election campaigns, the opportunity to interact directly and in real-time with the public via these channels is invaluable. Not only does it improve candidates' visibility, but it also offers an exceptional opportunity to detect public sentiment and adjust campaign tactics accordingly.

Rather than addressing a mass audience, interactive social media platforms allow politicians to connect with specific networks or certain groups of people (McQuail, 2010). These platforms expose politicians to voters with a variety of demographic profiles and political preferences (Diaz et al., 2016), eliciting the need for them to modify their communication tactics. Understanding the unique affordances of each social media website is crucial for politicians to effectively engage with their target audience (Hoffmann & Suphan, 2017). By leveraging these platforms, politicians can project an appealing image, maximise their impact on voters, and shape public discourse.

## Populist Communication via Social Media

Scholars identified a theoretical connection between populism and online communication early in the history of the Internet (Bimber, 1998). The Internet was viewed as a potential instrument for the restructuring of the political power of populists and for promoting direct communication between elected officials and the general public. Populists have demonstrated a strong desire to have a more immediate and direct bond with people (Canovan, 2002; Krämer, 2014), and that was offered by social media. As a result, social media websites are regarded as a significant factor in the rise of populism worldwide (Ernst et al., 2017; Waisbord & Amado, 2017).

According to Mudde (2004), populist ideologies are based on a fundamental dichotomy in politics and society that draws a contrast between "good", ordinary people and the elites who fail to represent their interests and pose a threat. In the populist dichotomy, elites are not just political figures; they also include traditional mass media, which are thought to serve the interests of the elites solely while ignoring those of the general public. Thus, among all politicians, populists, who are seeking to represent people, are particularly well-suited to use social media platforms for direct communication with the electorate (Ernst et al., 2017).

The literature identifies five essential elements of populist communication (Engesser et al., 2017): 1) emphasising the people's sovereignty; 2) advocating for the interests of the people; 3) criticising the elite; 4) marginalising certain groups, and 5) invoking the notion of the "heartland". Extensive research has focused on how populist ideas are communicated (Fieschi & Heywood, 2004), with scholars describing populism as highly emotional, negative, oversimplifying, dramatising, grounded in common sense, and characterised by conflict (Bos et al., 2010; De Vreese et al., 2018; Rooduijn, 2014). Additionally, research has demonstrated that populism takes on a fragmented form on social media platforms (Engesser et al., 2017) since populist communication on social media intentionally simplifies ideology to appeal to a larger audience and disseminates fragmented messages that spread within like-minded communities, reinforcing populist sentiments (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

# **Use of Visual Social Media Platforms by Politicians**

## ***Rise of Visual Social Media Platforms, Specifically Instagram***

The importance of the visual component of political communication has increased with the prominence of digital tools and the growth of social media platforms (Farkas & Bene, 2021), as shown by the enormous volume of visual content shared each day on sites like Facebook and Instagram (Stout, 2022), which symbolise the era of “ubiquitous photography” (Hand, M., 2012), and as shown by the popularity of such a platform as Tiktok which is entirely constructed around visual content, specifically videos. Compared to text messages, images are processed more quickly and have a higher potential for effective perception (Maurer, 2016) as even brief exposure to a photograph can result in the creation of consistent value judgments, underscoring the persuasive power of visual communication. Hence, modern political communication is primarily grounded in visuals, with politicians, especially political leaders, using Instagram as a key tool in their social media toolbox and as a “visual billboard” (Filimonov et al., 2016).

According to Serafinelli (2017), photography's symbolic value as "an element of social connection" contributes to Instagram's popularity (p. 109). The person is at the centre of a virtual universe in the digital age because people develop and express their social identities through the process of taking, saving, and exchanging photos online (Van Dijck, 2013). Digital photography, in particular, outperforms textual forms in enabling self-expression and impression management (Lee et al., 2015), providing a platform for sharing aspects of one's identity with others. Modern photography emphasises the creation of identity rather than the preservation of memories (Van Dijck, 2008).

The use of Instagram for self-representation becomes particularly significant for political candidates, as they employ marketing strategies to gain visibility, and sympathy from the electorate, and ultimately win votes. Much research was devoted to the examination of how political candidates utilise Instagram for the creation of a favourable image (Bast, 2021; Bossetta & Schmøkel, 2022; Farkas & Bene, 2021; Filimonov et al., 2016; Lavrov, 2022; Lavrov et al., 2022; Muñoz & Towner, 2017;

Peng, 2018; Russmann et al., 2019; Towner & Muñoz, 2020). Such research is typically based on the idea of photographic propaganda (Barragán-Romero, 2017), where photographs distributed by powerful entities to acquire or retain a privileged position of power are examined.

With every major candidate using an Instagram account during the 2016 US presidential election, Instagram became a popular tool for political campaigning in the US (Towner & Muñoz, 2020). When Jeb Bush introduced his Super PAC via Instagram rather than through a conventional press release, it attracted attention as a potential game-changer in political communication (Schwarz, 2015). Instagram was referred to as the new digital battleground (Frumin, 2015) throughout the campaign as politicians shared personal photos, informative infographics, polling results, behind-the-scenes images from events and rallies, and recordings of debates and interviews. During the 2016 primary season, there was a notable difference in the emphasis on issues between Instagram posts of politicians and mainstream news coverage. In contrast to newspapers, which discussed immigration, the economy, campaign finance reform, banking, and health care, candidates' Instagram posts were more focused on civil rights, corruption, climate change, gay rights/LGBTQ issues, and abortion rights (Towner & Muñoz, 2020). Consequently, during the 2016 presidential election in the United States, Instagram emerged as a prominent instrument for political campaigns, fundamentally transforming the landscape of political communication with a notable difference in issue emphasis compared to mainstream media.

Political leaders are expected to be active on Instagram to provide a steady stream of political news and information because followers are primarily driven by the desire for information and guidance (Parmelee & Roman, 2019), showing their openness to political posts influencing their voting decisions and political views. In contrast to other social media platforms, it was found that followers of political leaders on Instagram are less interested in self-expression and two-way communication (Sheldon et al., 2017). The visual nature of Instagram, with its visually appealing posts that make use of filtering features to accentuate attention-grabbing elements, plays a big part in encouraging information-seeking behaviour. It has been shown

that the use of images in a political environment can capture viewers and possibly affect their political behaviour (Graber, 1996), highlighting the significance of visual material on Instagram.

In-depth interviews with members of Generation Z, who frequently use Instagram, demonstrate two crucial aspects of politicians' Instagram posts that have a significant influence on their beliefs and actions: a politician's capacity for interaction with supporters, which builds trust and relatability, and the adoption of a backstage style, sharing personal experiences from the workplace and expressing emotions to increase authenticity (Parmelee et al., 2022). These elements help politicians and Generation Z followers connect personally and facilitate successful communication.

### ***Importance of Visual Content in Political Communication***

Given the few opportunities for direct interaction between politicians and citizens, visual messages are crucial in shaping public perceptions of politicians because they provide details about their backgrounds and personalities (Schill, 2012). These visual communications include a variety of aspects, such as nonverbal cues and symbols to transmit a variety of meanings (Page & Duffy, 2018) as well as to influence and manipulate the preferences of voters (Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987). Therefore, the power of images comes from their capacity to combine and communicate information at several levels, facilitating successful political communication (Bast, 2021).

Politicians post visual content on social media for a variety of reasons (Lavrov, 2022), including:

1. Creating a sense of statesmanship by posting pictures of government officials, other politicians, journalists, or symbols of the country (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019).
2. Creating images with children, family references, symbols of religion, physical embraces, and more that are seen as sympathetic (Muñoz & Towner, 2017).

3. Showcasing a mass appeal by posting images of large crowds or famous people (Ekman & Widholm, 2017).
4. Highlighting ordinariness through images of politicians taking part in sports, engaging in leisure activities, or interacting with the public (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019; Muñoz & Towner, 2017).

Political communication strategies can only be understood in the context of such visual content analysis because politicians' images can be viewed as "integrated structures of issue perceptions, persona perceptions, and other types of perceptions that hold significance to specific voters in particular elections" (Hacker et al., 2000, p. 230).

### ***Advantages of Instagram for Politicians' Communication during Elections***

In terms of self-representation, the use of Instagram by political candidates is critical. Political candidates use Instagram marketing techniques, as opposed to everyday users, to increase their visibility, appeal to the public, and ultimately win votes. The role of Instagram in a political candidate's campaign has been the subject of investigation in various studies (Farkas & Bene, 2021; Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019; Peng, 2018; Russmann et al., 2019; Steffan, 2020; Towner & Muñoz, 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019), which show different aspects of visual digital campaigning.

Instagram plays a critical role in political campaigning because it allows for the strategic uploading of polished content (Bossetta, 2018), harnessing the ability of images "to influence attitudes, public opinion, political motivation, participation, and action" (Müller et al., 2012, p. 311).

According to Filimonov et al. (2016), Instagram is used during political campaigns in four different ways: (1) to broadcast election messages; (2) to mobilise supporters and encourage their participation in campaign goals; (3) to manage and shape the party's and candidate's images by projecting an appealing and contemporary image to constituents; and (4) to amplify and complement other campaign materials, bridging the gap between social media and traditional media outlets. Overall,

broadcasting helps in spreading campaign messages, mobilisation drives voter engagement, and image management through personalization enhances the perception of political actors. In addition, the visual nature of Instagram allows for reinforcing messages from other media platforms or campaigns.

### ***Visual Communication of Populists***

Studies focusing on Instagram profiles of right-wing populist leaders have revealed compelling trends. For instance, studies conducted in Sweden have revealed that right-wing populists frequently post more personal content on the platform (Ekman & Widholm, 2017), while Muñoz & Towner (2017) discovered that they frequently use patriotic symbols in their Instagram images. Using strategies like making eye contact with viewers (Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020), blending in with crowds (Dobkiewicz, 2019), and showcasing interactions with various social groups (Bernhardt & Liebhart, 2017), politicians from this ideological spectrum primarily use Instagram to foster a sense of closeness with citizens. In addition, cross-platform studies suggest that Instagram tends to exhibit a more positive tone compared to other platforms, and show that right-wing populists on Instagram concentrate on a smaller range of issues, placing a special emphasis on topics that are consistent with their basic principles, such as security, economics, and labour (Dobkiewicz, 2019).

An important area of research focuses on whether populists employ distinct visual strategies and techniques. Scholars are examining the visual communication of populists to determine if some unique patterns and approaches differentiate them from other political actors. A quantitative content analysis of political parties' Facebook posts from 28 different nations (Farkas et al., 2022) showed that there is a similarity in communication styles among populist and non-populist political actors, which proves, to some degree, the homogeneity in campaigning techniques, while populist parties occasionally showed a greater tendency to highlight their leader and use national symbols.

The study of visual tactics used by 12 populist leaders in democratic states in 2020 (Lavrov et al., 2022) showed that populist leaders, comparable to non-populists, employ imagery that conveys personal and governmental power while still portraying

themselves as regular people. The study additionally examined the engagement patterns and revealed the appeal of close-up photographs and pictures of “ordinary life” as opposed to formal settings and posters. According to the study's findings, the visual clusters that were found may indicate many populist traits, such as the exaggeration of leaders' personalities and the importance placed on relating to the “pure” lower culture of the population. The research also revealed two separate tactics used by populists on social media: a charismatic politician-focused strategy (for instance, applied by Narendra D. Modi and Jair M. Bolsonaro) and a more institutional strategy where the politician is not the main character (Benjamin Netanyahu).

In general, studies on populist visual communication have provided valuable insights into the strategies employed by populist leaders on visual social media platforms. In addition to portraying their personal and national power, they often use personal content, patriotic symbols, and visual techniques to create a sense of closeness with their followers and emphasise key issues aligned with their populist agenda. There are also similarities in communication styles between populists and non-populist politicians, suggesting some homogeneity in campaigning techniques.

## **Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework**

Social media platforms allow politicians venues to carefully curate their public persona which can be explained through Goffman's dramaturgical theory. Equally, each platform is unique in terms of its particular features making use of specific content more pronounced which from the theory of affordances is due to their opportunities and limitations. One of the main reasons for the usage of social media by politicians is their ability to form public discourse which will be explained through theories of agenda setting, framing and public opinion formation. All the above-mentioned theories will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

### **Goffman's Theory of Self-Representation Applied to a Digitalised World**

Goffman's dramaturgical theory is applied in this study to explore the phenomenon of online self-representation. When engaging with others people try to create a positive self-image, similar to a "role", so that others can perceive them through this lens (Goffman, 1956). The use of images, which allow people to explore, establish, and reinforce their idealised self-identities as seen through the eyes of the media and others, is one strategy people use to project a favourable image (Caldeira, 2016).

The conceptualization of social interaction as a theatrical performance involves the distinction between "front stage" and "back stage" behaviour. The front stage represents what is observable to an audience, while the backstage pertains to what remains concealed from others. As a result, visual "stages" like Instagram allow people to present a filtered version of themselves to the world. An excellent example of Goffman's theory in this situation is how much influence individuals possess regarding impression management in the online space. Individuals, especially those considered influencers, use dramaturgical techniques to present an idealised version of themselves by purposefully choosing only certain pictures and captions to them to upload on Instagram (Caldeira, 2016; Deeb-Swihart et al., 2017). As a result, users assemble a whole story about themselves through their appealing online publications.

However, the persistent pressure to project a perfect image can make people unwilling to destroy the created façade. Excessive anxiety regarding the management of one's image, particularly in the context of online self-representation, can lead individuals to adopt what Goffman (1956) referred to as "dramaturgical discipline". This requires a constant and thorough focus on the social role people are playing to avoid any actions that can derail the illusion of their performance and undercut their desired acceptance from other people. Hence, any alterations in the communication strategy are typically meticulously planned and influenced by numerous factors. This problem also applies to well-known individuals, such as politicians, since once they commit to a particular online communication approach, it is difficult for them to change it because their public image has already been cemented. When their online persona becomes identifiable, the complexity of this issue intensifies.

Politicians now have access to social media as a crucial tool in their toolbox, giving them a platform to "play a role" and project a carefully cultivated personality to the public (Gordillo-Rodríguez & Bellido-Perez, 2021). It gives politicians the chance to customise how they are seen online, erasing the distinction between their real-self and the online personas they create. For politicians to leverage social media successfully, they must align their communication strategies with the prevailing trends and preferences of the online landscape. Politicians must stay aware of the current trends to adjust their messaging and style because social media platforms are continuously changing. This requires keeping up with the rapidly evolving algorithms, new features, and user behaviour trends that influence the dynamics of online engagement (Hong et al., 2019). By embracing the appropriate communication strategies and tailoring their online presence to suit the prevailing trends, politicians can effectively connect with their target audience, foster engagement, and potentially influence public opinion.

Politicians also need to precisely achieve a balance between projecting an idealised image and keeping an authentic connection with their supporters. Although it might be beneficial to develop a polished and aspirational persona, it is also crucial to

strike a chord of sincerity and relatability (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019) to appear honest and sympathetic to people's concerns and interests.

In this study the Goffman's theory will be utilised to explain the reasoning behind different styles of D. Trump's communication and strategic choice of visuals and text captions used by him on his Instagram account, with the aim of deriving wider conclusions for modern political messaging on social media.

## **Affordances of Social Media Platforms and the Mediatization of Politics**

Instagram lets users publish and share photographs and videos on their platform. Although the majority of social media sites are designed for the self-presentation of their users, each one provides individuals with unique structural affordances (Boyd, 2011). These affordances challenge existing models for understanding self-presentation behaviours (DeVito et al., 2017). Social media websites enable more than just one activity; they cover a variety of communication techniques and are used to meet a range of communicative requirements and goals (Smock et al., 2011). As a result, the limitations and opportunities provided by the platforms themselves also have an impact on how people choose to communicate on social media.

The "affordances" perspective was introduced by Gibson (1979) and is based on the idea that humans have different relationships with inanimate objects, depending on their background, experiences and environment. Objects are perceived in terms of the opportunities for action that they afford (Greeno, 1994). When used in the context of social media, affordances can be interpreted as the platform's actual capabilities, users' perceptions of what they enable, and the behaviours that develop as a result of their participation (Kreiss et al., 2018). For that reason, affordances are crucial for shaping user behaviour.

Politicians can express themselves and interact with their audience on social media using the distinctive features and functionalities that each platform offers. The

options available on a given platform have an impact on the decisions politicians make about the interactivity, style, and content of their publications. Mazzeloni and Schulz (1999), introduced the term “mediatization” to describe the influence of media platforms on the content of political messages. It refers to the phenomenon where political messages are adapted to fit the specific logic and constraints of the medium through which they are conveyed.

Politicians who want to use social media effectively must adapt to these affordances and modify their communication plans to fit each platform's requirements and capabilities. It involves taking into account Instagram's visual focus, the value of curated content, and the potential for visual and textual storytelling. Recognizing Instagram's advantages allows politicians to adjust their strategy to best portray themselves and interact with their followers in a way that fits the platform's characteristics. Answering these specific characteristics earns them the favour of the algorithm present on the platform, which on its own is an affordance of it.

In essence, the affordances approach highlights the distinctive qualities of social media platforms that influence user behaviour and communication tactics. These affordances shape the opportunities and limitations available to politicians, thus they can adjust their communication tactics and successfully interact with their audience by matching their goals with the platform affordances they use.

## **Agenda-Setting, Framing, and Public Opinion Formation Theories**

The project draws on theories of political communication, including agenda-setting, framing, and public opinion formation (Feezell, 2018; Valenzuela & McCombs, 2019). It will provide a deeper understanding of how Trump shaped his messaging strategies and how audiences respond to different types of his posts. It will also allow for an examination of the role of social media in agenda-setting and the impact of language and visual strategies in political communication.

## ***Agenda-Setting Theory***

Following the classic definition of Kingdon (1995), the political agenda is referred to as the “list of issues to which political actors pay attention” (p. 3). In consequence, agenda-setting is understood as the process of certain issues growing increasingly salient and others being neglected by candidates and, therefore, by their potential voters as well (Gilardi et al., 2022). Social media today has a considerable impact on the spectrum of problems that are discussed and debated in the political sphere (Feezell, 2018). By incorporating the theory of agenda-setting via social media platforms, the research can reveal insights about the rationale behind the decisions made by D. Trump and his communication team, and the strategies concerning the content they publish, as well as the language and visuals they employ. The approach will offer novel information about the dynamics of political communication in the social media setting, illuminating how politicians use the digital environment to influence public dialogue and shape their public image.

## ***Framing***

According to Entman (1993), framing is the process of choosing and stressing particular elements of perceived reality to make them stand out more in media coverage. The media can affect how people see a narrative and direct how they understand the message by carefully choosing and emphasising certain aspects of it (Bast, 2021). These carefully chosen components, referred to as “frames”, give the message a particular meaning. Frames are frequently created by combining textual and visual components (Van Gorp, 2007). Since it examines how media frames influence the public's understanding and interpretation of political issues, framing theory is widely used in the field of political communication (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). This study uses framing theory to investigate how political messages were created, and how these frames designed by politicians affect the way individuals perceive issues and events.

As for the visual frames, “the ideal candidate”, “the populist campaigner”, and “the sure loser” are three categories created by Grabe and Bucy (2009) to describe the visual frames used by politicians during election campaigns. While the latter frame is typically avoided by politicians for portraying themselves (Muñoz & Towner, 2017),

the other two frames are commonly employed. The statesmanship and compassion components make up “the ideal candidate frame”, which refers to qualities that are essential for carrying out the responsibilities of the office (Steffan, 2020). It is assumed that voters have “a mental picture of specific characteristics that an ideal presidential candidate should have” (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 102). Statesmanship is depicted through visuals of “power, authority, control, and active leadership” (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 102). Visual cues including government officials, patriotic symbols, symbols of progress, recognizable entourage, campaign promotional items or materials, political events, and formal clothes are used to portray statesmanship. Pictures of children, family members, religious symbols, gestures of affinity, interpersonal connection, and physical hugs are used to depict compassion in casual contexts. “The populist campaigner” frame emphasises ordinariness and mass appeal. Celebrities, enthusiastic audiences, and interactions with crowds are all signs of mass appeal. Ordinary individuals, casual clothing, sporting equipment, informal apparel, and physical activity all serve to depict ordinariness. Steffan’s (2020) previous application of this approach for the study of the social media content of politicians successfully yielded results indicating that candidates tend to employ the ideal candidate frame more frequently than the populist campaigner frame.

This study employs the Grabe and Bucy (2009) visual framing approach, to examine image management tactics and “character frames” used by D. Trump during his two election campaigns and his term as a President to reveal the strategic use of visual elements in constructing his image on social media for specific purposes.

### ***Public Opinion Formation***

Understanding the formation of public opinion, especially through the influence of elites is crucial for the functioning of a democratic society. In today’s media landscape, the rise of social media has become a significant component of a hybrid media system (McGregor, 2019). This system, as described by Chadwick (2013), examines the interactions between political actors, the media, and the public. The dynamics of public opinion formation have been significantly altered by the rise of social media and the communication technology that enables it. These modifications

have an impact on the social, technical, and communicative elements that shape public opinion.

When individuals express their political opinions on social media, these expressions are inherently public and relational (McGregor, 2019). They are shared publicly with or for an audience, unlike private conversations. Social media platforms, due to their conversational nature, serve as a collective arena where public opinion can manifest. In this sense, they can be compared to traditional public meetings or citizen groups, as discussed by Anstead and O'Loughlin (2015).

According to the study by Chong and Druckman (2007), the repetition of frames has a great impact on shaping an individual's opinions. Through consistent coverage, politicians can influence the perceived importance of specific frames and raise public awareness of certain issues. Ford and King (2015) argue that the repeated presentation of specific interpretations by the political actor or the media outlet makes those considerations more prominent in public discourse compared to alternative perspectives. Indeed, the mechanism of repetition influencing public opinion applies to news dissemination on social media as well (Gabore & Xiujun, 2018): the repetition of topics and frames on social media impacts the dynamics of public opinion.

By incorporating the theories of agenda-setting, framing, and public opinion formation in political communication and examining the dynamics of political communication on social media, this research contributes to the understanding of how the activity of a politician on a social media platform impacts how public opinion is shaped in the contemporary media landscape. Therefore, the novelty and significance of this study lie in the fact that results from computational visual and textual analysis will be investigated through the lens of the theories described above.

# Chapter 4. Methodology

## Digital Methods for Analysing Online Communication

This research is based on implementing the “digital methods” approach (Rogers, 2013) for analysing Trump’s publications on Instagram, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques for analysing visual and textual content.

Digital methods represent a distinctive approach to research that is deeply embedded within the technological environment it investigates and utilises (Omena et al., 2021). What sets digital methods apart is their emphasis on initially learning from the unique characteristics of the digital medium itself, including its underlying principles, forms, and dynamics. Consequently, researchers are encouraged to repurpose the existing methods provided by Internet platforms for social, cultural, or medium-related research (Omena et al., 2021). When analysing prevalent devices and methods within the online sphere, specific techniques for formulating queries become necessary (Venturini et al., 2018). A crucial aspect of this process involves the researcher’s ability to establish a set of words (such as URLs, hashtags, video or image IDs, and social media accounts) as the language of inquiry (Omena et al., 2021).

Under the Digital Sociology and Digital Methods schools of thought, qualitative-quantitative methods, emerging from Science and Technology Studies, have been implemented. These methods challenge social theorists’ and practitioners’ understanding of quantification as they embrace and affirm the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches as a whole, rather than separating them (Latour et al., 2012). Quali-quant methods require tremendous effort from researchers who must, in this sense, face the challenge of gaining in quantity without losing in quality (Venturini et al., 2015).

The proposed methods can be seen as part of a broader, widely used method, content analysis, which is designed to research “texts, images or expressions which are seen, read, interpreted and acted on for their meanings” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 13). Content analysis provides a systematic and rigorous framework for examining

and understanding the content within a given dataset. It involves identifying and categorising specific elements, such as words, themes, visual features, or communicative patterns, within the analysed texts, images, or expressions. By applying predefined coding schemes or developing new coding systems, researchers can quantitatively or qualitatively analyse the collected data.

Content analysis has long been a cornerstone in social science research, relied upon by scholars for its explanatory power (Petchler & González-Bail, 2015). Within the realm of political communication, content analysis plays a critical role in analysing and interpreting the messages conveyed by politicians and other political actors. This method is indispensable for understanding the nuanced and complex nature of political discourse, as the meaning and impact of political messages can only be fully comprehended through a thorough examination of their content (Benoit, 2010). With content analysis, researchers can go beyond mere surface-level analysis and delve into the deeper meanings and implications of political messages (Blassnig, 2023). By examining the content within political communication, scholars can uncover patterns of ideology, power dynamics, and public opinion formation. This methodological approach serves as a powerful tool for studying the role of political communication in shaping public discourse, political behaviour, and democratic processes (Graber, 2005).

## **Data Collection: Selection of Instagram Posts**

All the posts from Donald Trump's Instagram account (@realdonaldtrump) were downloaded using the PhantomBuster tool (*PhantomBuster*, n.d.) and all the information was inserted into a single spreadsheet. In total, there were 6072 posts, ranging from Trump's very first post in 2013 until his ban on Instagram in January of 2021. Each post in a dataset is associated with various types of metadata, which can provide valuable insights into the content and context of the communication (the extract from the dataset is in Appendix 1):

1. imgID: An identification number or code assigned to each image associated with a post. It helps in categorising and organising images within the data set.
2. postUrl: The URL or web address of a particular post, which allows researchers to retrieve and analyse the content directly.

3. description: The description refers to the text or caption accompanying the post. Analysing the language used in the description can provide insights into the message being conveyed.
4. commentCount: This represents the number of comments received on a post. Tracking comment counts helps researchers understand the level of engagement or interaction generated by a specific post.
5. likeCount: Like count indicates the number of likes received on a post. This metric is often used as an indicator of popularity or public sentiment towards the content.
6. location: The location metadata indicates the place or geographic information associated with the post. It can be used to analyse the geographical distribution or relevance of the communication.
7. locationId: Similar to the location metadata, locationId could refer to a unique identifier associated with a specific location. It helps in organising and categorising posts based on their geographic origin.
8. pubDate: PubDate represents the publication date or time of a post. It enables researchers to analyse the temporal patterns and trends in communication.

These metadata components can be utilised to learn more about various facets of Donald Trump's communication strategy, such as the popularity of particular posts, audience involvement, geographic reach, and temporal dynamics, along with other relevant variables. By analysing these factors, it is possible to uncover patterns, trends, and the effectiveness of communication strategies employed by Donald Trump.

## **Visual Analysis**

### ***Automated Visual Analysis of Politicians' Posts***

Despite the prevalence of automated text analysis of social media posts, there has been an evident rise in attention to investigating the visual communication tactics used by politicians. Researchers are increasingly examining the use of pictures in political communication in addition to text. The advancements in hardware capabilities, coupled with the development of computer vision and machine learning algorithms, have revolutionised social sciences research. One notable feature that

has emerged from these advancements is the ability to automatically recognize faces in uploaded images (Joo & Steinert-Threlkeld, 2022). This breakthrough technology has had a profound impact on various research fields within the social sciences.

The research on the application of computational methods for studying visual strategy encompasses a wide range of topics within the realm of political communication. Scholars have investigated visual strategies in the context of elections, including studies by Bast (2021), Farkas & Bene (2021), Steffan (2020) and Peng (2021). Populist visual communication has also received attention, as evidenced by the works of Schmuck & Hameleers (2020), Bast (2021) and Lavrov et al. (2022). The representation of collective actions, such as protests, on social media has been explored, for example, by Zhang & Pan (2019), while engagement patterns have been studied by Boulianne & Larsson (2021). Additionally, the role of emotions in visual communication has been examined by Boussalis et al. (2022) and Bossetta & Schmøkel (2022). The wide range of research areas described above highlights the extensive interest and importance of visual strategies in political communication, which can be effectively explored through computational methods.

### ***ImageWall Analysis for the Identification of Repetitive Patterns***

Mitchell's (1996) research underscores the influential role of images in shaping our social reality, emphasising that they actively contribute to constructing our understanding of the world. With advancements in image production technologies, images have become increasingly prevalent in our daily lives and play a central role in social media environments, as evident from recent studies on digital methods (Li & Xie, 2020; Pearce et al., 2020).

Adopting a visual semiotic approach, which emphasises “the cultural and social contexts in which images are made and consumed” (Aiello, 2020, p. 378), the analysis of image walls in digital methods enables researchers to systematically investigate the dominant meanings pictures generate (Penn, 2000). By doing so, the objective is to bring to light the hidden structures and provide a comprehensive

understanding of the visual strategies employed to communicate cultural and political narratives (Aiello, 2020).

Through the visual semiotic approach, researchers can discern the underlying visual patterns and trends that characterise Trump's communication across these different periods. By examining the symbols, gestures, and visual compositions, researchers can identify recurring motifs, rhetorical strategies, and narrative frameworks that contribute to shaping Trump's political discourse and public image. This analysis enhances our understanding of the visual dimensions of Trump's communication strategy and provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of his political communication.

The quantitative analysis of ImageWall can be conducted using PicArrange (Jung et al., 2022), a powerful tool that offers advanced image-sorting capabilities. Unlike traditional sorting methods based solely on name or date, PicArrange enables sorting based on image content and colour, facilitating more efficient and comprehensive analysis. By employing this visual sorting mode, researchers can rapidly inspect and search through large volumes of images, saving valuable time and effort in the data exploration process.

### ***Clustering Utilising Computer Vision APIs***

The advancements in computer vision, a subfield of machine learning, have the potential to revolutionise content analysis by enabling automated labelling of visual material. By combining automated visual analysis with platform metadata, researchers can employ qualitative-quantitative approaches to better understand the narrative patterns of images and the techniques of content distribution across various platforms (Omena et al., 2021). This approach has been successfully applied in diverse areas of study, including semantic mapping of cities (Ricci et al., 2017), analysis of image circulation (d'Andréa & Mintz, 2019), and examination of institutional communication (Omena & Granado, 2020).

Computer vision APIs are powerful tools that enable developers and researchers to analyse images using advanced algorithms and techniques. Some of the most

important computer vision APIs include Google Vision API, Microsoft Azure Computer Vision API, Amazon Rekognition, IBM Watson Visual Recognition, and Clarifai. These APIs offer features such as image classification, object detection, facial recognition, and text extraction, providing valuable insights for various applications and research projects.

The Google Vision API (Vision AI | Cloud Vision API, n.d.) is a cloud-based machine learning tool provided by Google that offers a range of computer vision capabilities. It allows developers and researchers to integrate powerful image analysis functionalities into their applications or research projects without needing to develop complex algorithms from scratch. The API uses deep learning models to understand and interpret the content of images. In this research, The Google Vision API will be used to identify objects in the pictures published on Instagram by D. Trump as this tool already proved its efficiency for the analysis of visual communication of political leaders (Lavrov et al., 2022).

Computer vision algorithms can automatically extract multiple features from images, such as objects, faces, and backgrounds. However, this raises new challenges related to interpretability. Researchers must navigate the complexities of understanding and interpreting these extracted features while also considering different scales of observation, reference, and comparison (Omena et al., 2021). The integration of computer vision into content analysis offers exciting opportunities for more efficient and comprehensive visual research. It allows for the automation of labelling processes and the exploration of narrative patterns and content distribution across different platform cultures. While these advancements present challenges in terms of interpretability and scale, they open up new avenues for studying and understanding visual material in the digital age.

In the field of social research, computer vision APIs have relied on script files as a crucial technical component. However, these tools have caused difficulties for non-developers or those without coding expertise. To address this issue, the Memespector Graphical User Interface (GUI) (Chao, 2022) was developed as a research software tool. It simplifies the process of invoking the Google Vision API, making it more accessible to researchers working with large image collections.

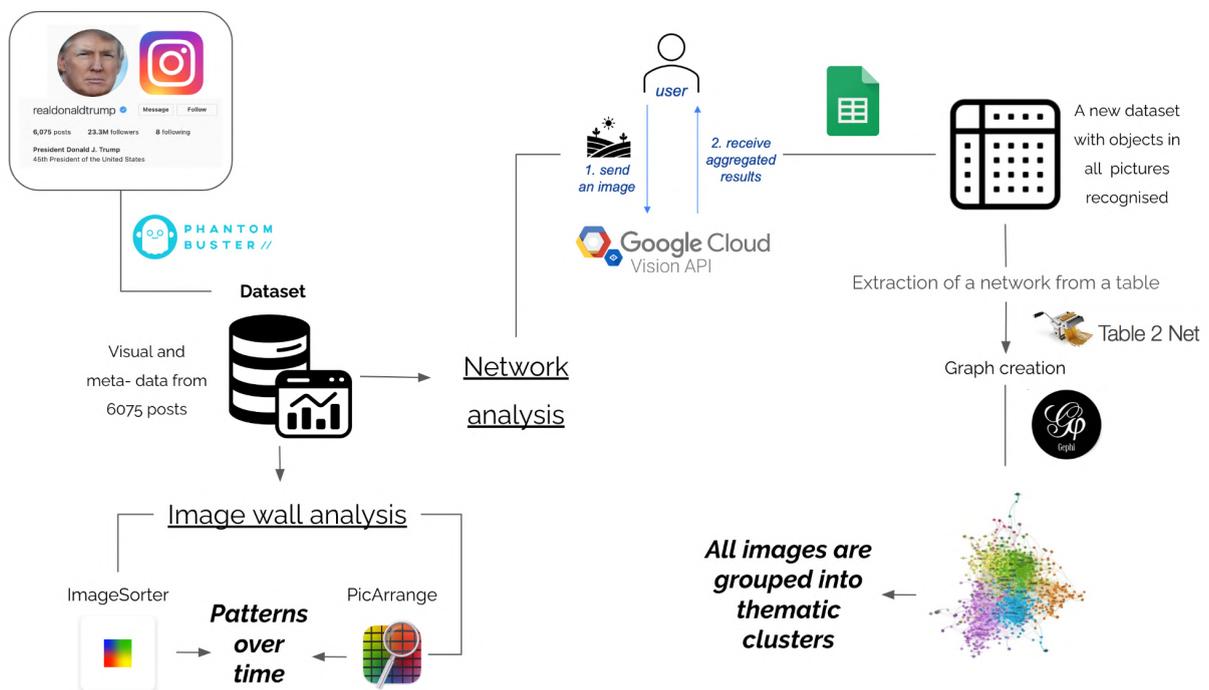
Computer vision APIs offer detailed descriptions of the main objects in an image on a word-by-word basis. However, this level of analysis alone may not be sufficient for visual clustering. To enhance the understanding of content and visual composition, a cutting-edge approach involves combining computer vision APIs with network theory to create an image-label network (Omena et al., 2021). This network makes it possible to examine photos by adding actual annotations right onto the image. This allows for a more thorough investigation of the visual components and their interactions. This approach was already successfully implemented for the analysis of the visual communication of D. Trump on Instagram in 2020 (Lavrov, 2022).

In this research network analysis will be performed using the Gephi software (Gephi - The Open Graph Viz Platform, n.d.). The labels acquired from GoogleVision APIs are compiled into a spreadsheet and, to proceed with network analysis, the tool Table2Net (*Table 2 Net*, n.d.) is used to enable researchers to convert tabular data into network representations. The nodes of a network, which is to be built, will indicate all various images and labels. The edges of a network will indicate how many times a certain label is associated with a given image. Based on the different connections between images and labels, it is possible to perform image classification with a continuous graph layout algorithm called ForceAtlas2 (Jacomy et al., 2014), which will output several clusters as a result. The images in each of the clusters will have a certain theme in common (Omena et al., 2021). These themes will constitute the most frequent patterns which are found in the chosen samples of photos.

After the formation of groups using ForceAtlas2, the researcher engages in a meticulous process of examining each group separately and defining their topics. This involves closely analysing the content and characteristics of the images within each group to identify the underlying topics and themes. The researcher's expertise and discernment come into play as they carefully observe and interpret the visual elements, patterns, and contextual information present in the images. By delving into the details and nuances of each group, it will be possible to gain insights into the specific topics that emerge within Trump's visual communication strategy. This systematic approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the thematic patterns that shape Trump's online visual communication, shedding light on the key messages and narratives conveyed through these images.

Overall, the utilisation of ImageWall analysis and visual analysis with computer vision APIs enables researchers to uncover hidden structures and patterns within large sets of images. By conducting ImageWall analysis, a comprehensive understanding of the primary patterns observed over time is gained. Additionally, network analysis techniques are utilised, leveraging the outcomes of APIs, to effectively group images into thematic clusters. This methodology offers a systematic and efficient way to explore and interpret visual data, providing valuable insights into the content and meaning of the images under investigation. The research protocol (figure 1) shows the main steps which should be taken to conduct an automated visual analysis. Recognizing the intricacies involved in implementing these methods, such as the integration of diverse software tools and technical practices, the protocol aims to promote transparency throughout the research process.

**Figure 1**  
*Research Protocol for Automated Visual Analysis*



## **Textual Analysis**

### ***Automated Textual Analysis of Political Texts***

The use of computational approaches for studying digital texts in the social sciences has significantly increased over the past decade. The increase in data availability and improvements in analytic software are the main reasons for this expansion (Baden et al., 2022). The three essential pillars of the scientific method, observational techniques, theoretical approaches, and experimental research, are significantly impacted by computational methods (Hilbert et al., 2019). Social scientists have created their own computational text analysis tools in addition to incorporating software and concepts from computational sciences into their research. This development has aided in the exploration of massive amounts of textual data across a range of social science specialities, expanding research opportunities.

Researchers have employed computational methods to study various aspects of online political discourse, including the dissemination of fake news (Longhi, 2021), the self-presentation strategies of politicians (Colliander et al., 2017), the communication tactics employed by populists (Schmuck & Hameleers, 2020), and election campaigning techniques (Stier et al., 2018).

By offering insightful information, natural language processing (NLP) helps improve the understanding of political texts (Orellana & Bisgin, 2023). NLP approaches are particularly useful for several tasks, such as determining how similar two documents are (Singh & Singh, 2021), topic modelling to identify the key topics covered in documents (Wang, 2023), and sentiment analysis to determine the emotional tone of the text (Bestvater & Monroe, 2023).

### ***NLP for Topic Modelling***

As the integration of the online and offline realms deepens, researchers are faced with the need for innovative approaches to investigate online social phenomena within offline contexts. Traditional data collection and data analysis methods struggle to keep pace with the vast amounts of data generated on social media platforms. In response, academics have turned to computational approaches to collect and analyse this data effectively. One of the subtasks which are examined as part of data

analysis is topic modelling. It has gained popularity in recent years as the insights from the results of topic modelling allow researchers to harness social media data to examine specific phenomena of interest such as, for instance, political events (Fang, 2019), public health (Cheng et al., 2022), climate change (Biesbroek et al., 2022) and far-right actors' rhetoric (Vidgen et al., 2022).

In the context of social media data, modelling and extracting meaningful insights from social media platforms may be challenging, depending on which machine learning models are utilised. Traditional topic models, such as the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) proposed by Blei et al. (2003) and the Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA) proposed by Foltz (1996), are effective in analysing longer online content but struggle to generate semantic meaning from shorter texts (Zou & Song, 2016). As a result, the development of topic models specifically designed for short text analysis has become a vibrant area of research in the field of natural language processing (NLP). Researchers are actively exploring novel approaches and techniques to effectively model and extract meaningful topics from the concise nature of short texts found in social media (Laureate et al., 2023).

In this research, the BERTopic model, a modification of BERT (Grootendorst, 2022) for topic modelling is used to understand how captions under Trump's Instagram posts provide more context to each posted image and what narratives Trump was trying to convey through his texts. BERTopic was chosen specifically for this task as the model has many advantages over similar models such as LDA or NMF (Egger & Yu, 2022). Firstly, BERTopic has demonstrated excellent performance in handling short and unstructured texts, making it suitable for the inherent characteristics of social media data. It leverages the power of the BERT language model, which has been pre-trained on a large corpus of diverse texts, enabling it to capture intricate semantic relationships and extract meaningful topics from short snippets of text. Secondly, BERTopic presents an automated approach for calculating the optimal amount of topics. The algorithm chooses the appropriate number of topics during the early stage of analysis rather than relying on manual specification, ensuring a more data-driven and objective approach to topic modelling. High robustness is another asset of BERTopic. It can handle the noisy and diverse data that is frequently present in social media data, and it can also account for linguistic diversity, spelling

mistakes, abbreviations, and colloquial idioms. Furthermore, BERTopic offers adaptability via its Python framework, enabling researchers to customise the algorithm according to specific needs. For instance, it supports semi-supervised or guided topic modelling, enabling the incorporation of prior knowledge or human guidance to enhance the quality and relevance of the extracted topics (Grootendorst, 2022).

### ***Preprocessing of Textual Data***

Before applying the main algorithms, all the textual data had gone through preprocessing. All the stopwords which are present in the Python *nltk* library (Bird et al., 2009) for the English language were removed from the texts, except for the word “again”, which is a crucial part of Trump’s main election slogan “Make America Great Again”. Besides, all the account tags and several hashtags (#Repost, #Twitter) were removed after preliminary model training as it had been discovered that they have a significant influence over which cluster a post is assigned to. After that, the dataset was ready to be inputted into the BERTopic model with most of its main parameters staying at default, while the chosen embedding model was “all-mpnet-base-v2”. Since BERTopic works with vectorized texts, there was no need to remove punctuation and certain symbols specifically, the used vectorizer model was *sklearn*’s Countvectorizer (Pedregosa et al., 2012). Besides, no rare words were deleted as well due to the algorithm working with the td-idf statistic instead of the simple word count.

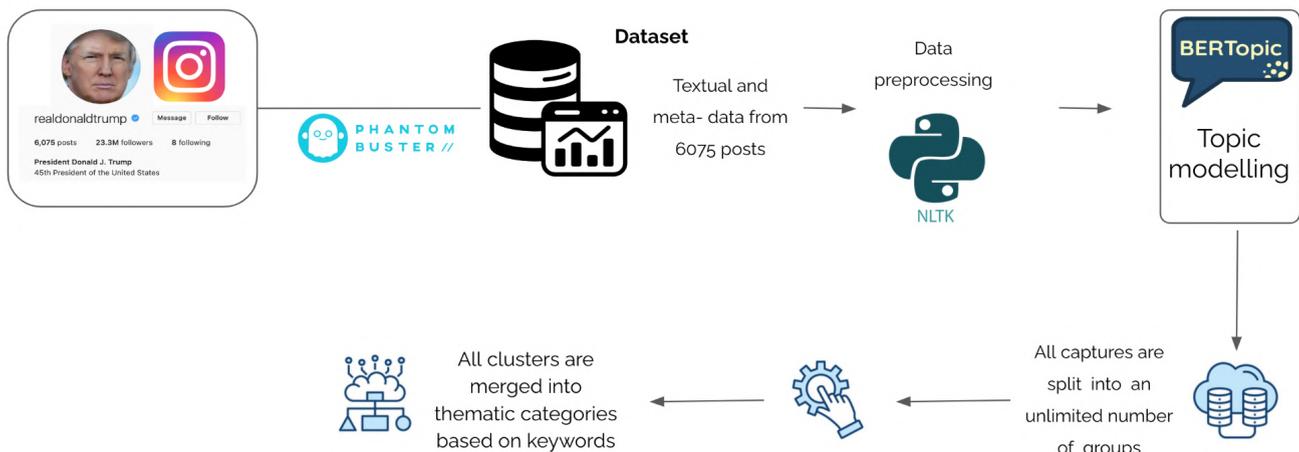
### ***Topic Modelling and Identification of Key Themes***

The topic modelling process utilised a combined approach of quantitative text analysis and qualitative clustering, incorporating human judgement. The probabilities generated by BERTopic are used to assign each caption to a specific cluster, resulting in the division of all posts with captions into smaller clusters. The number of clusters is intentionally left unspecified to allow for flexibility and avoid limiting the algorithm’s potential. Due to the large number of resulting clusters and the observed semantic similarities sometimes a qualitative approach can be adopted to merge and consolidate the clusters into thematic categories (Alonso Dos Santos et al., 2023).

This involved examining frequent and unique keywords assigned by BERTopic to each cluster to identify common themes and patterns. The clusters then are qualitatively merged, resulting in a reduced set of thematic categories that capture the main topics and trends present in the data. This approach ensured a more coherent and meaningful interpretation of the data, facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the content.

With the use of this methodology, textual material may be explored and interpreted in a systematic manner, which makes it possible to extract insightful information about the content of the texts that are being investigated. The procedure shown in Figure 2 highlights the essential steps needed to carry out an automated textual analysis utilising BERTopic.

**Figure 2**  
*Research Protocol for Automated Textual Analysis*



The outcome of this stage is a transformed dataset in which each post is associated with a specific thematic group. By assigning each post to a thematic group, the dataset becomes structured and provides a clearer representation of the underlying topics and patterns present in the data.

## **Validation**

To my knowledge, BERTopic has not been used for the analysis of Instagram posts of politicians prior to this research, hence, validation is a crucial step. Although topic modelling itself is an unsupervised task in NLP, due to the novelty of using this algorithm in the current domain, a test set was used to evaluate the capabilities of the model. More than 300 posts (about 10% of the whole dataset) served as a test set which was manually labelled based on the thematic categories determined beforehand. While this evaluation method may be criticised in terms of assessing the overall quality of the model, it served the specific purpose of understanding how well the algorithm could handle the given dataset consisting of the short captions from D. Trump's Instagram account. The results obtained are promising, with an accuracy of 78% and an average F1-score of 0.77. These metrics indicate a high level of performance, especially considering the multiclass classification nature of the task and the presence of numerous potential categories. The model's ability to achieve such high accuracy and F1-score values highlights the effectiveness of BERTopic in categorising and analysing the social media posts of politicians. This is also supported by previous research where BERTopic was applied to cluster tweets (Uthirapathy & Sandanam, 2023).

## **Visual and Textual Analysis Combined**

In contrast to traditional approaches that often analyse visual and textual content separately, this research takes a novel approach by recognizing the interconnectedness and coherence of posts of politicians in the eyes of viewers. By considering posts as holistic and unified pieces of communication, a combined analysis of visual and textual content will be conducted.

This integrated approach acknowledges the way people consume and interpret posts of politicians on online platforms where visual and textual elements are presented together (Parmelee et al., 2022).

This cutting-edge approach recognizes the complex and dynamic nature of online communication, where both visual and textual components work together to shape

public opinion. The combined research provides a deeper understanding of the impact of political messages delivered through visual and textual elements. This study will make use of the findings from topic modelling-based textual analysis as well as visual analysis, specifically the visual clusters. A thorough grasp of the content can be achieved by combining both strategies, taking into account the visual and linguistic aspects of the content published by D. Trump.

# **Chapter 5. Trump's Communication Strategy: Case Study and Data Analysis**

## **Donald Trump's Communication Strategy and Populist Leadership**

### ***Key Elements of Donald Trump's Political Communication Strategy***

An important case study for evaluating modern populist political communication, particularly in terms of visual tactics, is Donald Trump's approach to social media. Trump and his communication team demonstrated remarkable proficiency in leveraging social media channels, building a solid online personal brand, and ultimately winning the 2016 presidential election as well as retaining his influence during his presidency.

Numerous distinctive and unique features are seen in Donald Trump's communication style, which was defined by Morini (2020). His direct, unmediated contact with the audience is one standout quality. Because of this method, he has been called "a disintermediator-in-Chief", echoing the political tactic of "disintermediation", which entails speaking to the public directly on private social media platforms. Significantly, Trump's communication strategies have mostly remained the same since he declared his campaign in 2015. His engagement with the public has not changed into a more conventional "presidential" approach despite winning the election. Instead, he has persisted in attacking his political rivals, adopting the guise of a "permanent campaigner" who started his reelection campaign as soon as he won in 2016. Furthermore, Trump possesses a showman-like talent that has enabled him to win a significant amount of votes and maintain a consistent media presence. His reputation as a "clown performer" has been shaped by his sense of humour, unusual look, and the prevalence of online memes. It is crucial to highlight that despite the amusing features of his communication, his language frequently aligns with populist impulses and frequently uses metaphors of conflict, confrontation, and the demonization of particular groups, hence allowing him to define his communication style as "populistic". Last but not least, Donald Trump's reputation as a public person is influenced by the media

landscape in which he operates as well as his actions. His image and exposure have been amplified and improved by this media environment.

### ***Trump's Communication Strategy during the 2016 Election***

Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election is frequently seen as one built by his superb communication abilities, with social media playing a crucial part (Gingrich, 2017). Trump used social media throughout the primaries to voice his opinions on numerous topics and occasionally to criticise his Republican competitors, especially on Twitter (Phillips, 2015). Social media has surpassed the reach of regional and national print newspapers to become a significant source of news about the presidential election. Trump persisted in being active on social media after winning the primary elections and used his platform to exert influence as a trendsetter (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Although all three candidates - Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, and Bernie Sanders - maintained similar posting frequencies on Facebook and Twitter, their content and focus differed significantly (Pew Research Center, 2016). Each candidate carefully tailored their messaging, selecting only those messages and topics that served their campaign objectives. Clinton's communication had a stronger campaign-oriented approach, whereas Trump aimed to engage with news outlets and the public. Sanders employed a combination of these strategies. During the election campaign, Trump employed a range of specific communication strategies that had a significant impact and garnered high levels of engagement. These strategies included "gaslighting", "defamation", "otherization", "media intimidation", "lack of transparency", and "the fake apology" (Tisch, 2016). Each of these tactics played a role in shaping public perception and generating interest and discussion around Trump's candidacy, having an impact on the election results (McLaughlin & Macafee, 2019).

Through his tweets and Instagram posts, Trump mainly criticised globalisation, integration, and traditional political ideologies. He also attacked Muslims, refugees, and immigrants, associating himself with the larger populist movement on a worldwide scale (Campani et al., 2022). Nationalist principles were at the heart of

Trump's presidential campaign, which also made use of long-standing myths and symbols of an ethnic conception of American identity (Pérez-Curiel et al., 2021). His tweets presented the idea that numerous immoral outsider groups, who were distinguished by their foreignness, religion, and self-interest, were threatening the moral white majority (Schertzer & Woods, 2021). His slogan, "Make America Great Again", symbolised this propaganda, which attempted to arouse nostalgia for an unidentified golden past.

Compared to his verbal communication, Donald Trump's visual communication approach during the 2016 election has not garnered as much attention. It is nevertheless important since Trump accepted the idea that "The words don't matter anymore. The pictures matter" (Gingrich, 2017). In sharp contrast to Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump continually portrayed himself as the ideal candidate, he was displaying flags and other patriotic symbols and was upholding a professional image by wearing suits (Steffan, 2020). These visual signals were purposefully employed to reinforce his capacity to keep his commitments by projecting an image of statesmanship and competence.

### ***Trump's First 100 Days of the Presidency***

Several repeating trends in Donald Trump's visual communication were identified by Strand and Schill (2019) in their investigation of his political image-making during his first 100 days in office. The primary purpose of the official White House social media accounts was to highlight Trump's achievements and solidify his identity, dominance, and legitimacy as President (Shaw, 2017). Through his social media, only an idealised representation of Trump was displayed. This included patterns like Trump seated at a desk or table, text displayed on images, signing documents, foreign leaders, audience applause, the phrase "Make America Great Again", Trump by himself with a quote, direct Twitter reposts, and references to the military and veterans. In pictures with other people, Trump frequently stood in the middle, following the principle of linear perspective. He used text in about 40% of his postings, occasionally adding Twitter screenshots to keep his social media profiles consistent. During this time, pictures of Trump with his family or in casual settings

were comparatively uncommon. Notably, Donald Trump released many "unprofessional" images on social media (Chun, 2018), in contrast to his predecessor, which contributed to his "amateurish yet authentic style in social media" (Enli, 2017, p. 9). To sum up, Trump's social media posts during his first 100 days in office had two main purposes: demonstrating his perceived accomplishment and strength as a leader and establishing the legitimacy of his office and government.

### ***Trump's Communication Strategy during the 2020 Election***

One of Trump's primary benefits during the second election campaign was his dominance in the internet sphere, which gave him a broad platform to interact with supporters and spread a narrative that minimised his vulnerabilities regarding the pandemic, unemployment, and race relations. However, in general, Trump's second election campaign is under-researched, accordingly, few insights can be found in the literature.

For instance, Trump's strategy on Twitter during this period was to appear as a strong politician who was ready to take on the political establishment and what he called the "unholy alliance" of dishonest officials, the media, and politicians (Shear et al., 2019). Trump was supposed to be portrayed as someone who understood the difficulties faced daily by regular people.

Research conducted by Lavrov (2022) analysed Trump's visual strategy on Instagram. Using visual communication techniques, throughout the second presidential campaign Donald Trump was shown in such roles as a strong president, an American patriot, and a family man. The main categories of posts in Trump's Instagram content were outdoor activities, President Trump running his reelection campaign, crowds of supporters, a smiling patriot and family man, and posters, quotes, and hand-outs. The study also discovered that while content with controversial political overtones drew unfavourable responses, content with positive descriptions and more intimate content was more engaging. Thus, Trump's Instagram visual strategy centred on highlighting his exceptionalism and inspiring loyalty among his supporters.

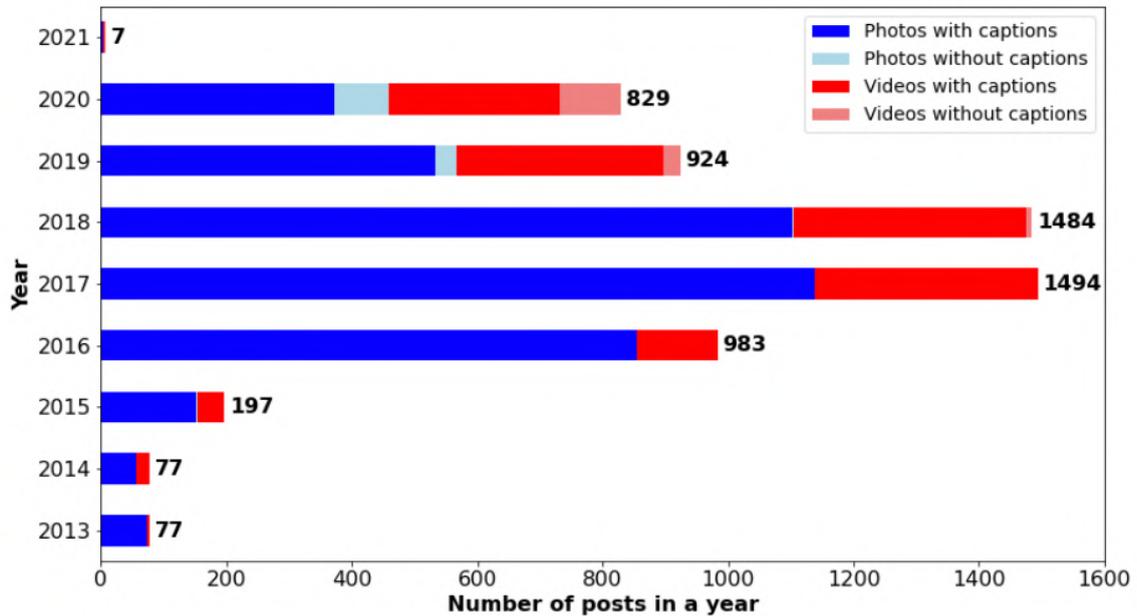
From the literature review, several key issues and insights can be derived. Social media platforms transformed communication dynamics and societal trends. They have both positive and negative impacts on politics - on one hand, enabling increased transparency and citizen engagement, on the other, contributing to the dissemination of misinformation and political polarisation. Politicians use these platforms strategically, bypassing mainstream channels, devising their public image, and engaging directly with the public, focusing on personalised and tailored messaging. By enabling politicians to share campaign-related content and engage with the public in real-time, social media platforms also play a crucial role in political campaigning. Special focus was placed on visual communication in contemporary political discourse as a result of the rise of social media platforms that emphasise visual content, particularly Instagram. Politicians use Instagram as a tool for self-representation and for projecting a positive image of themselves.

All the papers reviewed relate to the theoretical framing which is crucial for fitting the findings in the wider body of contemporary scholarship. The following chapter will focus on the theoretical part, needed to explain the insights from the empirical part of the study.

## **Descriptive Statistics**

The initial dataset consisted of 6072 posts, ranging from April 9th 2013 to January 5th 2021. All the data, including all the metadata, likes and comments, was collected in January of 2023. The detailed distribution of Trump's posts is depicted below (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
*Distribution of Trump's Posts on Instagram by Type*



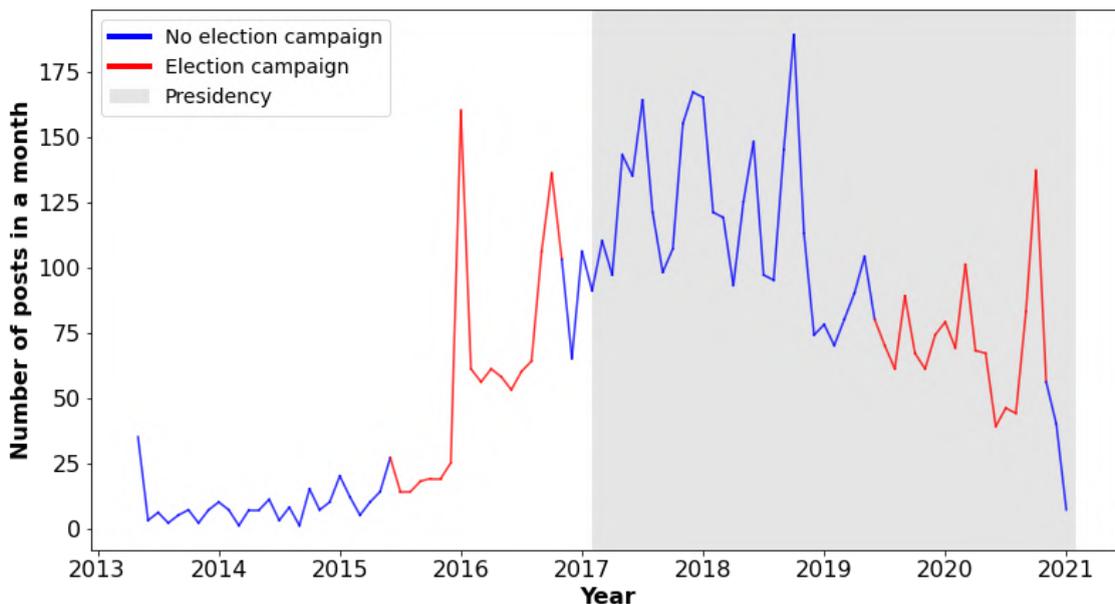
Donald Trump was not a highly active user of Instagram in 2013 and 2014, with 2015 seeing the number of posts double with the announcement of his candidacy. In 2016, however, the number of posts quintupled during his first election campaign, reaching approximately 1000 posts annually. A peak in Instagram activity was reached in the years 2017 and 2018, which were distinguished by a large number of postings — around 1500 posts per year, and together they account for 50% of all the posts in the analysed period. On Instagram, there were fewer posts in 2019 and 2020, indicating a trend of reducing the number of posts per week.

In terms of the distribution of content types, all posts in 2016 featured captions. This pattern persisted in 2017, with captions consistently being associated with both videos and photographs. However, there was a subsequent shift towards including posts without captions for both videos and photos, indicating that the visual content alone was deemed sufficient without additional textual context. On the whole, from 2016 to 2020, Donald Trump utilised Instagram frequently, posting a diverse range of content that comprised both visual and textual elements.

Figure 4 illustrates the monthly dynamics of D. Trump's Instagram communication. It reveals a significant surge in activity during the initial stages of his election campaign

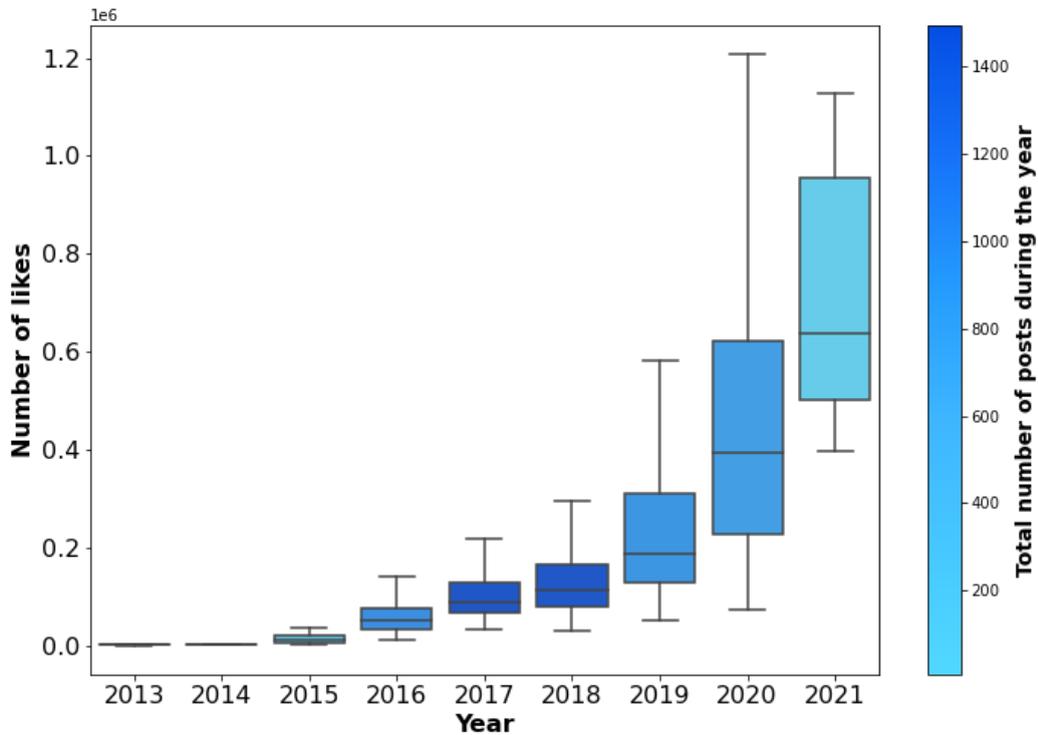
in early 2016, followed by fluctuations throughout the campaign. Instagram remained a prominent communication channel during his presidency, as evident from the consistent number of posts per month. In contrast to the first campaign, Trump's reelection campaign saw a decrease in the frequency of Instagram posts. However, as the second election drew near, there was a significant increase in Instagram activity. These findings suggest that D. Trump's Instagram communication strategy evolved, reflecting the changing dynamics of his political campaigns.

**Figure 4**  
*Distribution of Trump's Posts on Instagram Over Time*



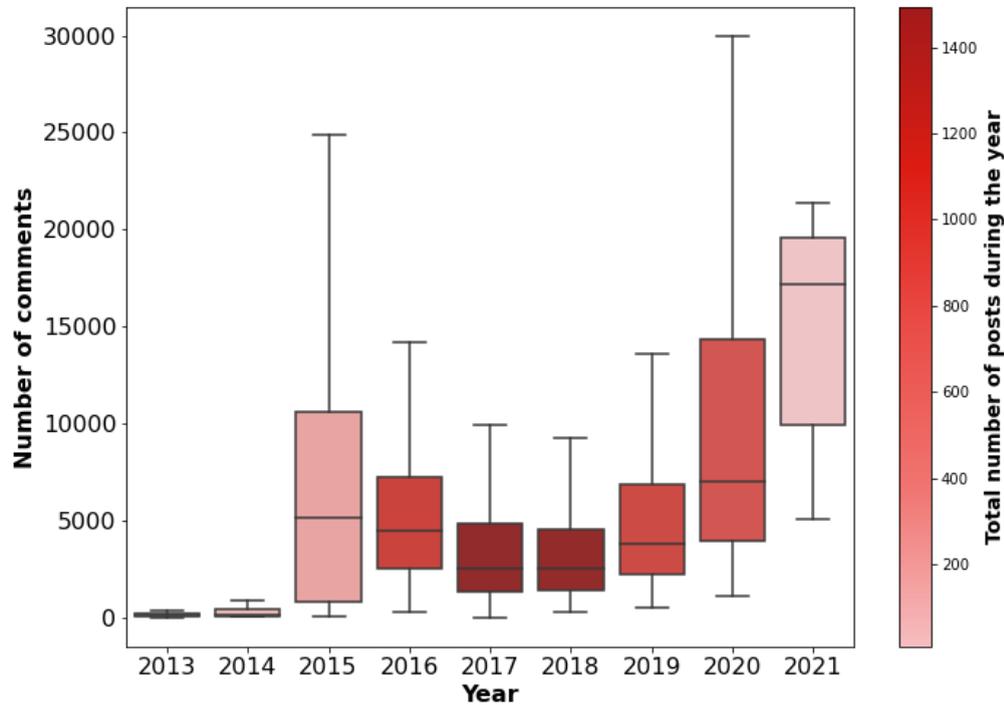
The average number of likes on D. Trump's Instagram posts has shown a gradual increase since 2013, aligning with the growth in his follower count and overall social media visibility, as Figure 5 shows. It is important to note that the average number of likes on D. Trump's Instagram posts does not necessarily indicate explicit support from people, as Instagram does not have a feature for users to "unlike" a post. However, it does provide insights into the overall engagement and interaction with his posts on the platform.

**Figure 5**  
*Distribution of Likes on Trump's Posts on Instagram Over Time*



The dynamics of comments under D. Trump's posts on Instagram do not follow the same trend as the number of likes as can be seen in Figure 6. While there was a significant increase in comments in 2015, the years 2017 and 2018 witnessed the lowest numbers despite a high frequency of posts during that time. However, there was a gradual increase in comments afterwards, with 2020 marking the highest number of comments received on posts on Instagram. In conclusion, the analysis of comments under D. Trump's posts on Instagram reveals a distinct trend. The dynamics of comments do not align with the number of likes, suggesting that user engagement goes beyond mere popularity measured by likes. This underscores the intricate nature of user engagement which consists not only of the number of likes by publication but also the number of comments, the size of the following base and other factors.

**Figure 6**  
*Distribution of Comments on Trump's Posts on Instagram Over Time*



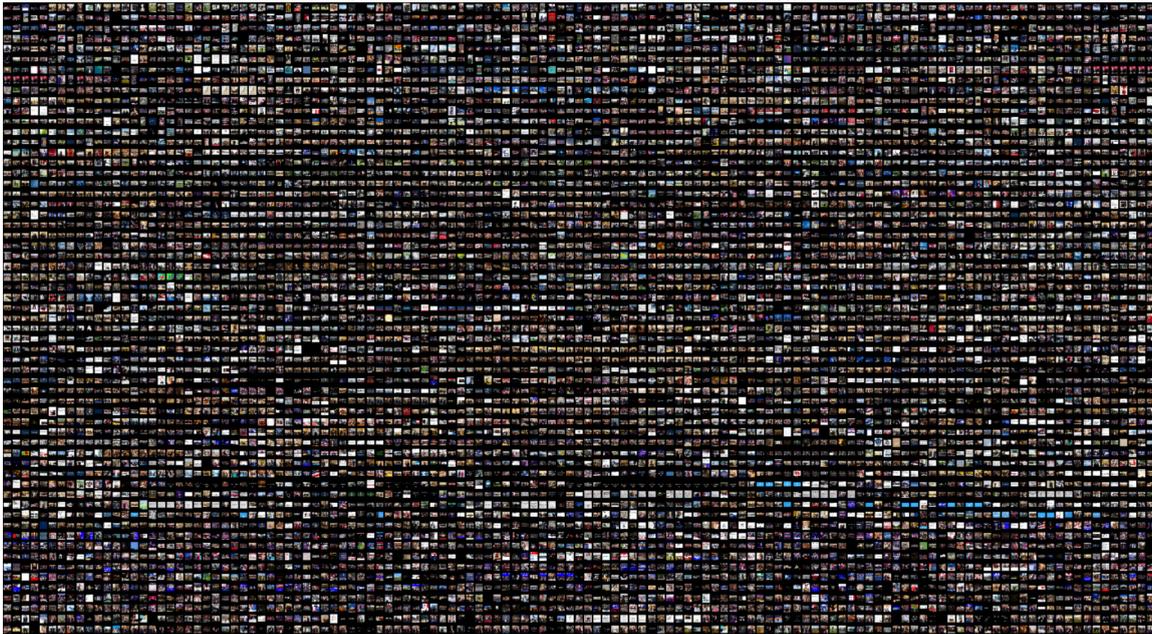
## Visual Strategies Employed by Donald Trump on Instagram

### *Patterns of Visual Communication Over Time*

The dataset used for analysis consisted of 6,072 posts collected between April 9th, 2013 and January 5th, 2021. In the visual analysis, only the first pictures in carousels were included, and videos were excluded, thus resulting in a total of 4409 pictures available for investigation (Figure 7).

Using the visual semiotic approach, the underlying visual patterns and trends that are characteristic of Trump's communication throughout various periods can be identified.

**Figure 7**  
*Image Wall of all Images Posted by Trump on Instagram*



The first period selected for analysis corresponds to D. Trump's first election campaign, which began in 2015 and concluded at the end of 2016 (Figure 8). During the analysis, several distinct patterns emerged from the visual content:

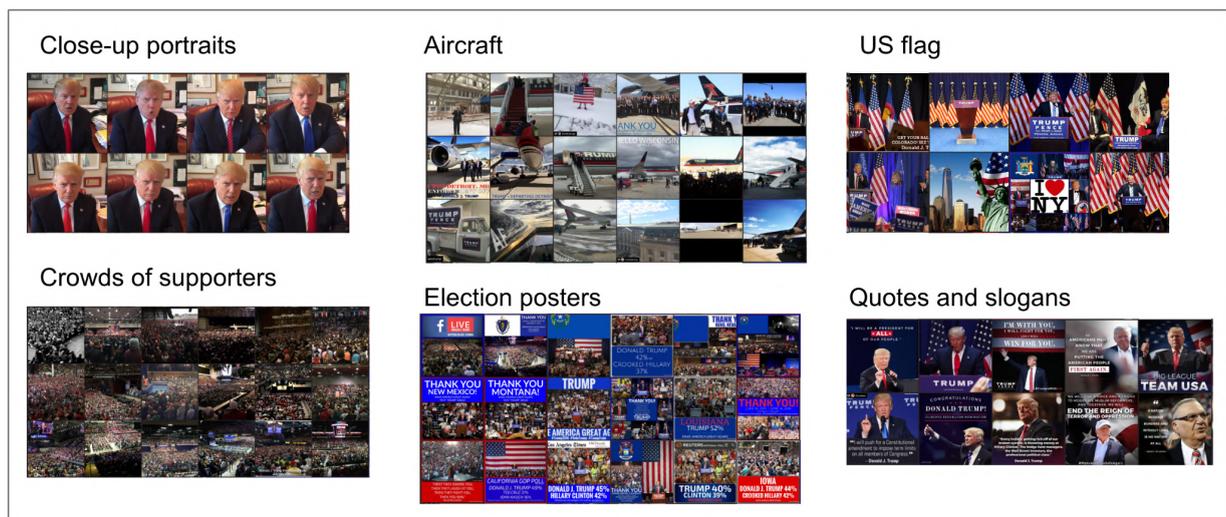
1. Close-up portraits: Close-up portraits of D. Trump as visual cues throughout the first election campaign. These portraits served to present his individuality and build a bond with the viewer. By featuring his face prominently, the campaign aimed to establish familiarity and build trust with potential voters.
2. Aircraft: The presence of aircraft in the visual content can be attributed to Trump's frequent use of private planes and helicopters during his campaign. Trump wanted to portray himself as a great businessman and leader, and these pictures reflected that. They also showed prosperity and authority.
3. US flags: Displaying US flags in the campaign imagery served as a symbol of patriotism and national pride. It aimed to evoke a sense of American identity and reinforce the notion that Trump's campaign represented the interests and values of the country.
4. Crowds of supporters: Images capturing crowds of supporters highlighted the enthusiasm and popularity surrounding Trump's campaign. To promote

Trump's candidacy and develop a sense of unity among his supporters, these images attempted to convey an impression of mass support.

5. Election posters: The presence of election posters in the visual content indicates the campaign's focus on promoting Trump as a candidate. These posters typically featured his name, slogan, and key messages, aiming to increase brand recognition and reinforce his campaign's identity.
6. Quotes and slogans: Including quotes and slogans in the visual content helped convey key campaign messages and capture the attention of viewers. Memorable slogans such as "Make America Great Again" became synonymous with Trump's campaign, and the use of graphics served to emphasise the main points and goals of his campaign.

**Figure 8**

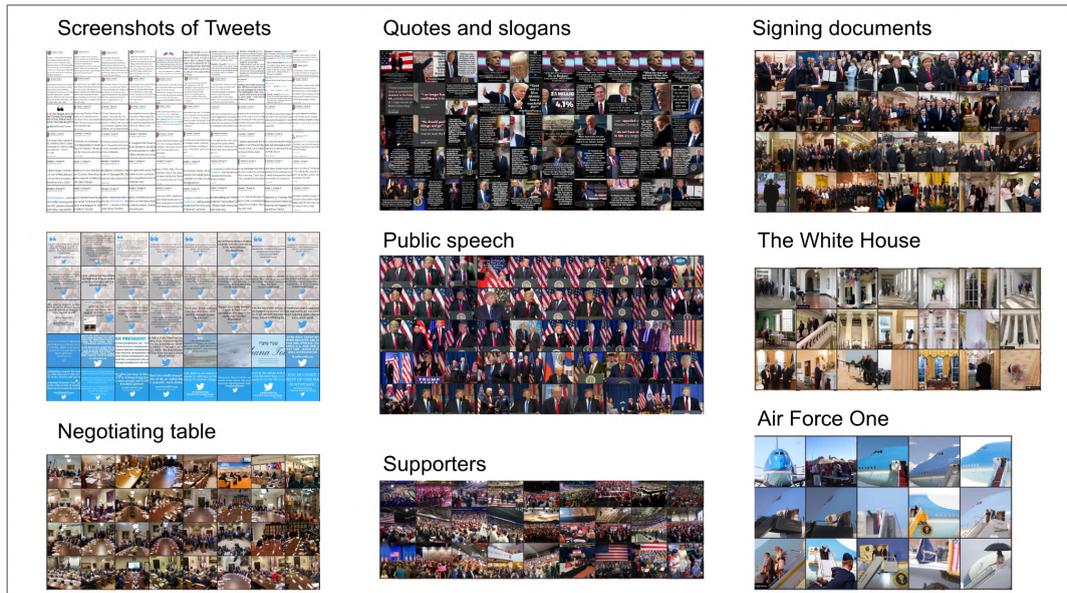
*Patterns of Images Posted by Trump During the First Election Campaign*



The second time frame selected for the ImageWall analysis concentrated on the period when D. Trump was the President of the United States but had not yet launched his reelection campaign (Figure 9). This period aimed to examine the visual communication strategies employed during his presidency, separate from the context of an ongoing campaign.

**Figure 9**

*Patterns of Images Posted by Trump During his Presidency*



The analysis of the "presidency" period revealed several prominent patterns in the images posted by D. Trump. These patterns include:

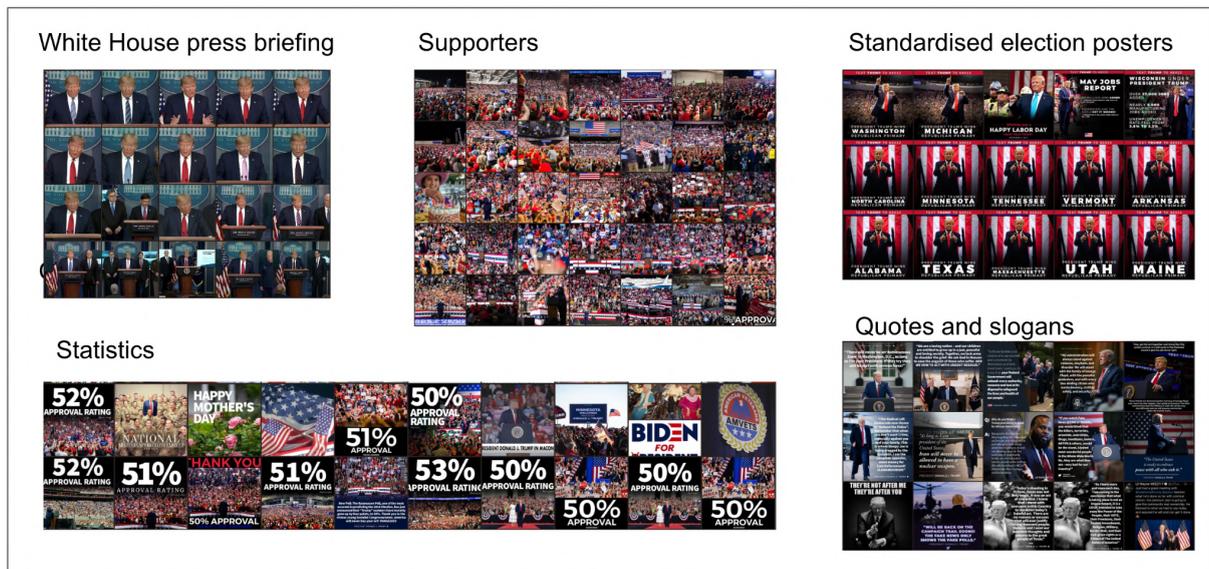
1. Screenshots of tweets: A significant number of posts consisted of screenshots of tweets made by D. Trump. This highlights the importance of his Twitter presence and his use of this platform as a means of communication. This notable convergence of platforms in D. Trump's social media communication allowed him to reach a wider audience by leveraging the strengths of both platforms. Trump was able to spread his messages and interact with his supporters across several platforms by posting screenshots of his tweets on Instagram. With this strategy, he was able to combine the clarity and directness of tweets with the visual and interactive elements of Instagram.
2. Quotes and slogans: Many posts featured quotes and slogans associated with Trump's presidency. Throughout this period, Trump strategically incorporated visually appealing graphics and images overlaid with impactful quotes and slogans into many of his social media posts. These visual elements were carefully designed to capture attention, convey his political agenda, and resonate with his audience. Moreover, these visuals aimed to showcase his involvement in governance and decision-making processes.

3. Public speech: Photos of Trump delivering public speeches. Trump's communication approach heavily relied on public speeches, and he frequently posted pictures of himself giving them on social media. These images served as a means to showcase his interaction with supporters and the general public, providing a glimpse into the dynamics of his public engagements (Shaw, 2017). By sharing images of himself engaging directly with the public, he sought to portray himself as a relatable leader who listened to the concerns and aspirations of everyday Americans, a traditional visual frame used by US presidents (Glassman & Kenney, 1994). This approach aimed to create a sense of connection and trust not only with his supporters but also with people who did not vote for him.
4. The White House interior and exterior: Images showcasing the interior and exterior of the White House were prevalent. These visuals aimed to convey Trump's position of power and authority as the President. Moreover, showcasing the exterior of the White House symbolised the presidency itself. The White House is not only a physical structure but also a powerful symbol of the American presidency. By featuring images of the White House from various angles, Trump sought to evoke a sense of pride and admiration for the institution of the presidency and the role he played within it (Shaw, 2017). The inclusion of these images also had a strategic communication aspect. By sharing visuals of the White House, Trump aimed to project an image of stability, strength, and competence.
5. Negotiating table: Photos depicting Trump engaged in negotiations or meetings, often at a formal table setting, were commonly observed. These images sought to portray Trump as a strong leader involved in important diplomatic and policy discussions.
6. Supporters: Posts featuring supporters of D. Trump, including crowds at rallies or individuals expressing their support, were a consistent pattern. These visuals aimed to convey a sense of mass support for Trump and his policies.
7. Air Force One: Images of Air Force One, the presidential aircraft, were frequently shared during this period. These visuals symbolised Trump's travels, both domestic and international, and his role as the President.

During the period when Trump held both the role of president and campaigner, his visuals reflected the duality of his positions and the strategic messaging associated with them (Figure 10). Several patterns emerged in his visuals during this time:

1. White House press briefings: Trump utilised visuals from White House press briefings to emphasise his effectiveness and competence as a president. These images showcased him addressing the media and delivering important updates or policy announcements, highlighting his role as a leader in managing national affairs.
2. Crowds of supporters: As a campaigner, Trump heavily relied on visuals featuring large crowds of enthusiastic supporters. These images aimed to demonstrate the widespread support he enjoyed and create a sense of momentum and energy around his campaign.
3. Standardised election posters: Trump's visuals during this period often featured standardised election posters, adhering to a consistent design and layout. These posters typically showcased his name, campaign slogan, symbols associated with his party, and the names of different states. The use of standardised posters helped to establish a recognisable visual identity for his campaign and gain support from people across different states.
4. Statistics: Visuals featuring statistics, achievements, and approval ratings were frequently used to highlight Trump's accomplishments as president and to build a narrative of success. These visuals aimed to convey a sense of progress, success, and popularity to appeal to potential voters.
5. Quotes and slogans: Trump continued to incorporate quotes and slogans into his visuals during this period. These powerful statements helped to reinforce his messaging and political agenda, serving as concise and memorable expressions of his campaign promises and policy positions.

**Figure 10**  
*Patterns of Images Posted by Trump During the Second Election Campaign*



In conclusion, the examination of Trump's visual communication throughout three different periods indicates recurrent patterns that were deliberately used to express particular meanings. The goal of the images during the first election campaign was to convey a sense of broad acceptance and popularity as well as leadership and success. During the "presidency" time, screenshots of tweets were utilised to reinforce Trump's messages, resulting in a confluence of Instagram and Twitter. His authority as President and his contacts with the public and supporters were further highlighted by the images featuring negotiations and briefings. The images mirrored Trump's multiple roles during the third period. During that time, he emphasised his political goal and accomplishments using phrases, slogans, and figures. At the same time, he chose pictures with crowds and election posters to garner support from people across different states. Overall, the patterns in Trump's visual communication demonstrate a strategic approach to shaping his image and effectively conveying his messages to the audience.

## Visual Clustering

### Overview of Visual Clusters.

The visual clustering in this study followed a two-step process. Firstly, object recognition by Google Vision API was employed to identify objects in the pictures.



professional or official environment. Rallies and public events are symbolised by the colour orange, which denotes energetic and passionate crowds. Posters and screenshots are associated with the colour cyan, which denotes visual representations of digital content. Summits and negotiations are represented by the colour yellow, which reflects high-level or diplomatic discussions. The colour blue symbolises an unstructured environment and is used to denote informal settings. Green represents the outdoors and indicates events or scenarios that occur in a natural setting. Violet indicates automobiles, indicating components associated with transportation. Purple is the colour of the military, denoting topics about the armed forces. Finally, there were many images which could not be attributed to any of the clusters described above, so they were all merged into one cluster 'other'.

### **Description of Main Visual Clusters.**

The visual content of each cluster was qualitatively interpreted, and the following description focuses on the five most significant clusters.

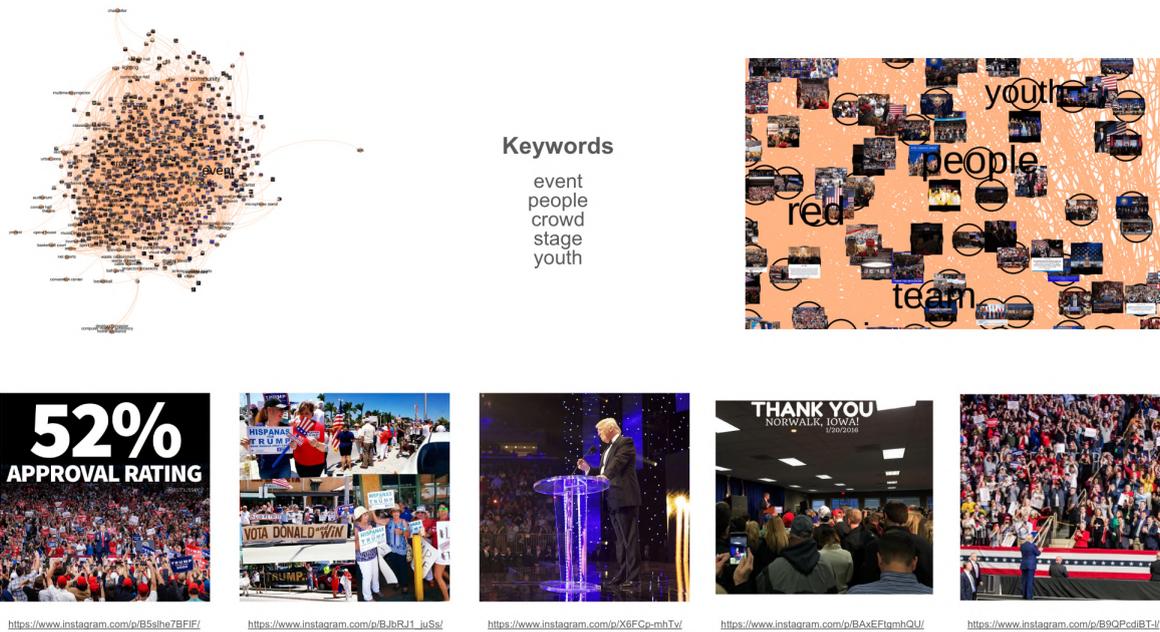
The largest cluster is the "formal setting" (21.8%) (Figure 12). This cluster primarily consists of images portraying D. Trump participating in formal events, as indicated by keywords such as "tie", "public speaking", and "suit", among others. There are several reasons why photos of D. Trump at formal gatherings have been widely published. He actively participated in a variety of official events as a politician and public figure, providing him with the opportunity to meet supporters and establish himself as an influential political figure. He was able to effectively project professionalism, authority, and leadership in formal contexts, which increased his credibility and sense of statesmanship (Steffan, 2020). Publishing photos from formal occasions helped him to promote his political agenda, gain attention, and create a compelling visual story that highlighted his accomplishments in policy and reaffirmed his status as an important political player.

**Figure 12**  
*The Visual Cluster "Formal Setting"*



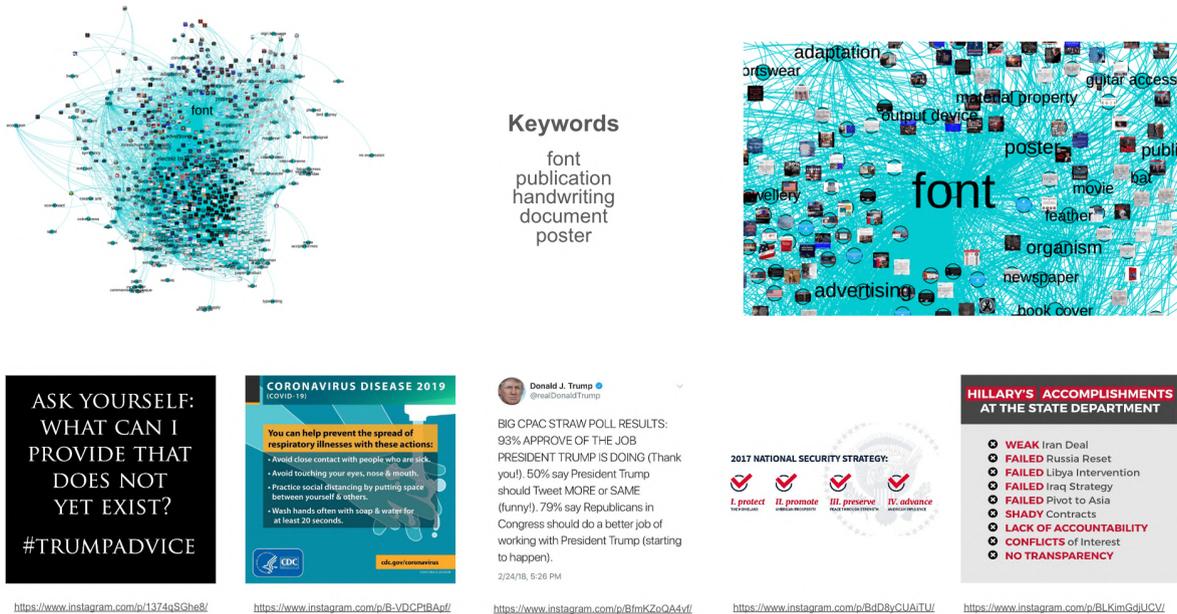
The next cluster, "rallies and public events" (16.8%) (Figure 13), predominantly includes images of D. Trump participating in electoral events. These images are characterised by keywords such as "event", "crowd", and "stage", among others, indicating the presence of D. Trump in various campaign-related gatherings and public rallies. The cluster captures the essence of his active involvement in electoral activities, showcasing his engagement with supporters, addressing large crowds, and utilising the stage as a platform to deliver his messages. The relevance of these events in D. Trump's political communication strategy is highlighted by the prominence of this cluster, which also emphasises his campaign's efforts and the significance of engaging voters throughout election campaigns.

**Figure 13**  
*The Visual Cluster "Rallies and Public Events"*



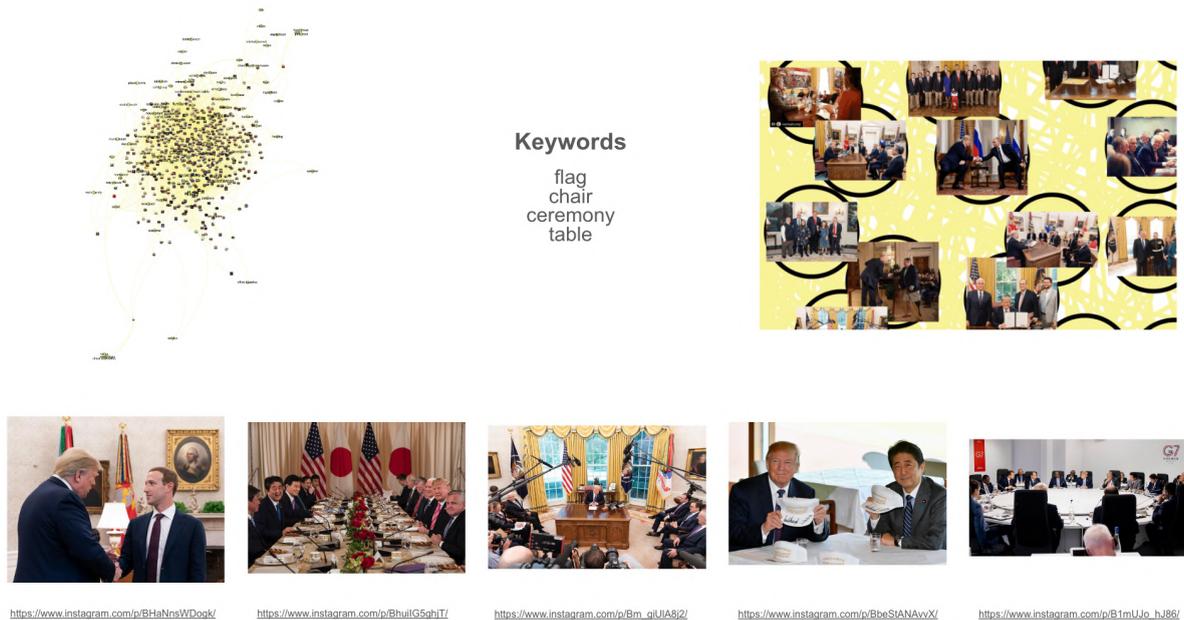
The cluster labelled "posters and screenshots" (15.3%) (Figure 14) stands out as a substantial cluster within the dataset. This cluster primarily consists of images that feature publications, documents, and posters related to D. Trump. The presence of keywords such as "publication", "document", and "poster" indicates that these images capture various printed materials and screenshots associated with D. Trump, including campaign posters, promotional materials, news articles, and official documents. It emphasises the importance of visual representations beyond photographs. These pictures are part of a larger visual story that surrounds Donald Trump's political endeavours, advertising, and public image. Notably, this cluster also contains content that has been taken from or combined with material from other platforms, including screenshots from social media or photos of content from online publications. This demonstrates how content from several sources was combined to provide a coherent visual picture of D. Trump's political activities and campaigns.

**Figure 14**  
*The Visual Cluster “Posters and Screenshots”*



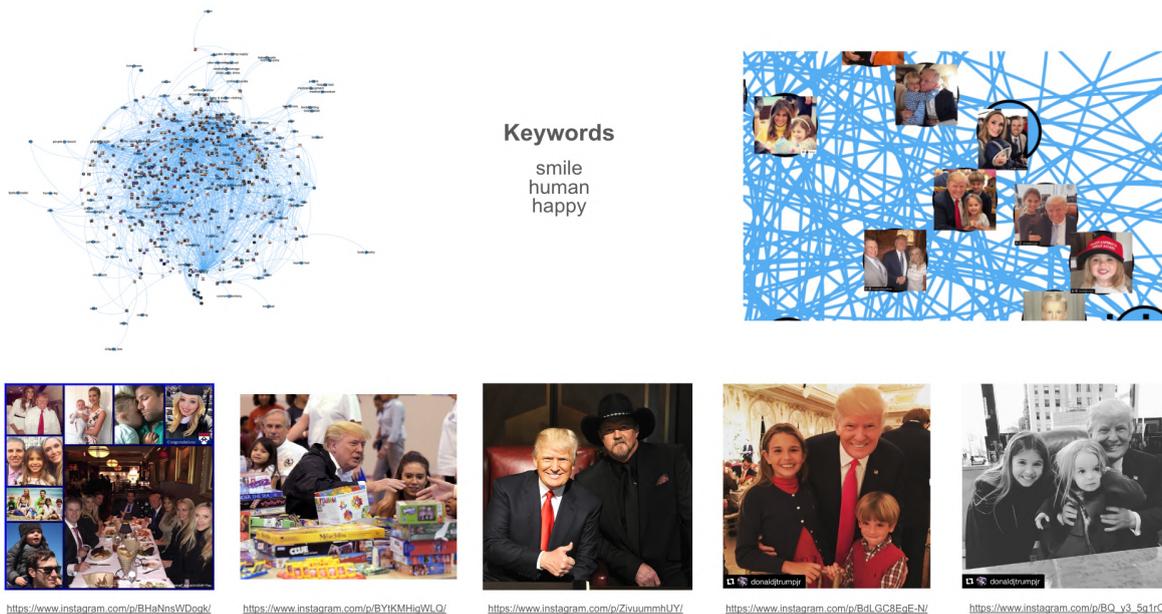
A significant portion of D. Trump's visual communication strategy involved the publication of pictures featuring "summits and negotiations" (11.6%) (Figure 15). This cluster, identified by keywords such as "chair", "ceremony", and "table", consists of images capturing moments from various diplomatic summits, negotiations, and official ceremonies in which D. Trump was involved. These photos frequently show D. Trump interacting with diplomats and world leaders, signifying his involvement in international issues and his position as a figure in politics taking part in important decision-making processes. By posting these photos, D. Trump hoped to demonstrate his participation in important diplomatic events and convey a sense of leadership on the international scene.

**Figure 15**  
*The Visual Cluster “Summits and Negotiations”*



The "informal setting" cluster (Figure 16) comprises approximately 9.4% of the images in the dataset and is characterised by apolitical keywords such as "human" and "happy". This cluster includes pictures that depict D. Trump in casual or non-political contexts, capturing moments of leisure, personal interactions, or informal settings. These photos provide glimpses into D. Trump's private life by showing him interacting with friends, family, and fans in casual and laid-back settings. D. Trump wanted to project a more relevant and approachable image by publishing these photos; doing so would show his human side and help him establish a connection with his audience. The "informal setting" cluster's inclusion in the research provides a comprehensive look at D. Trump's visual communication approach, noting the significance of emphasising both his formal and informal characteristics to appeal to various audiences.

**Figure 16**  
*The Visual Cluster “Informal Setting”*



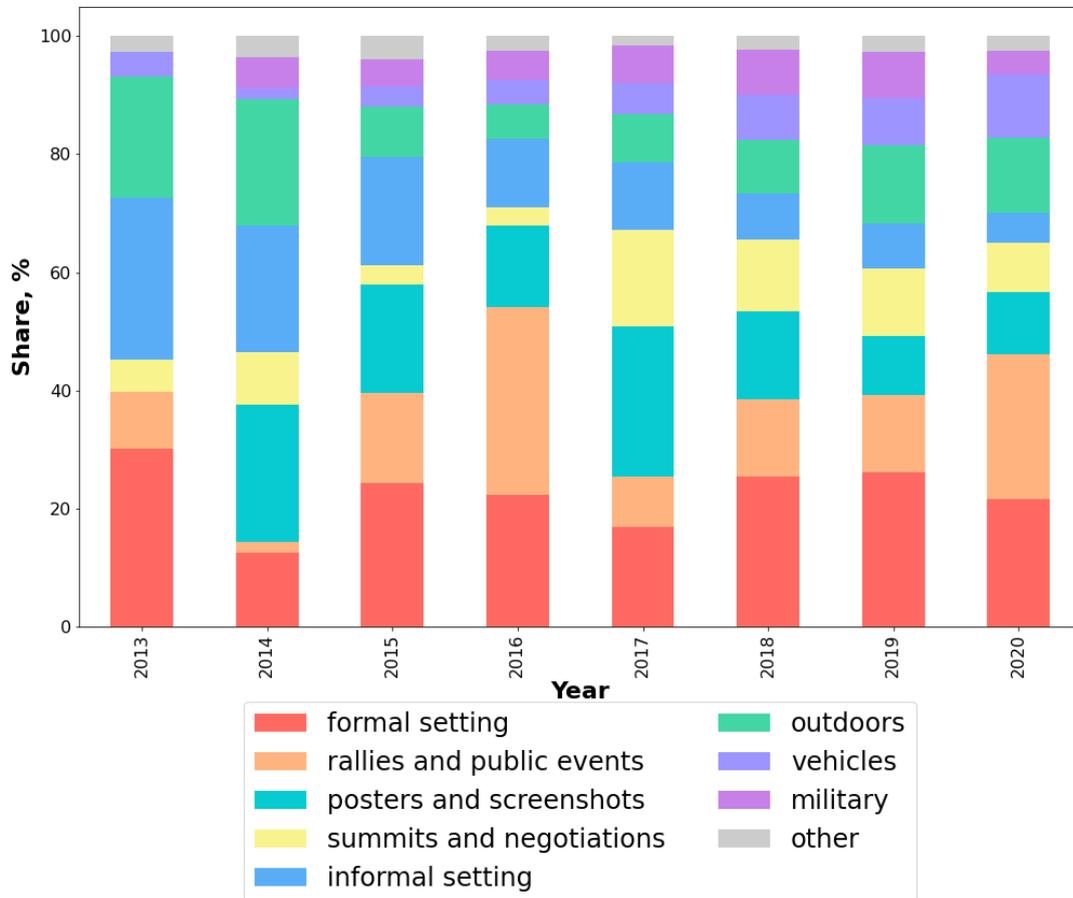
### Dynamics of D. Trump’s Visual Communication

Figure 17 illustrates the dynamics of D. Trump's visual communication. His posts from 2013 and 2014 showed a largely balanced mixture of professional and informal settings, along with a lot of outdoor images. During this period, other categories were less prominent. However, in 2015, when he began his first election campaign, there was a noticeable shift towards fewer informal pictures and outdoor settings. This trend continued into 2016, with more than half of his pictures depicting formal settings, rallies, and public events. This shift in content reflects his focus on the election campaign and engaging with his supporters through political events.

In 2017, there was another shift in the dynamics of his visual communication. Posters and screenshots played a significant role, along with pictures from negotiations and formal settings. This shift may indicate his emphasis on policy and political messaging during that period.

In 2018 and 2019, his visual communication became more balanced across different topics, with a predominant focus on formal settings. Other clusters were relatively equal in representation during these years.

**Figure 17**  
*The Dynamics of Trump's Visual Communication Over Time*



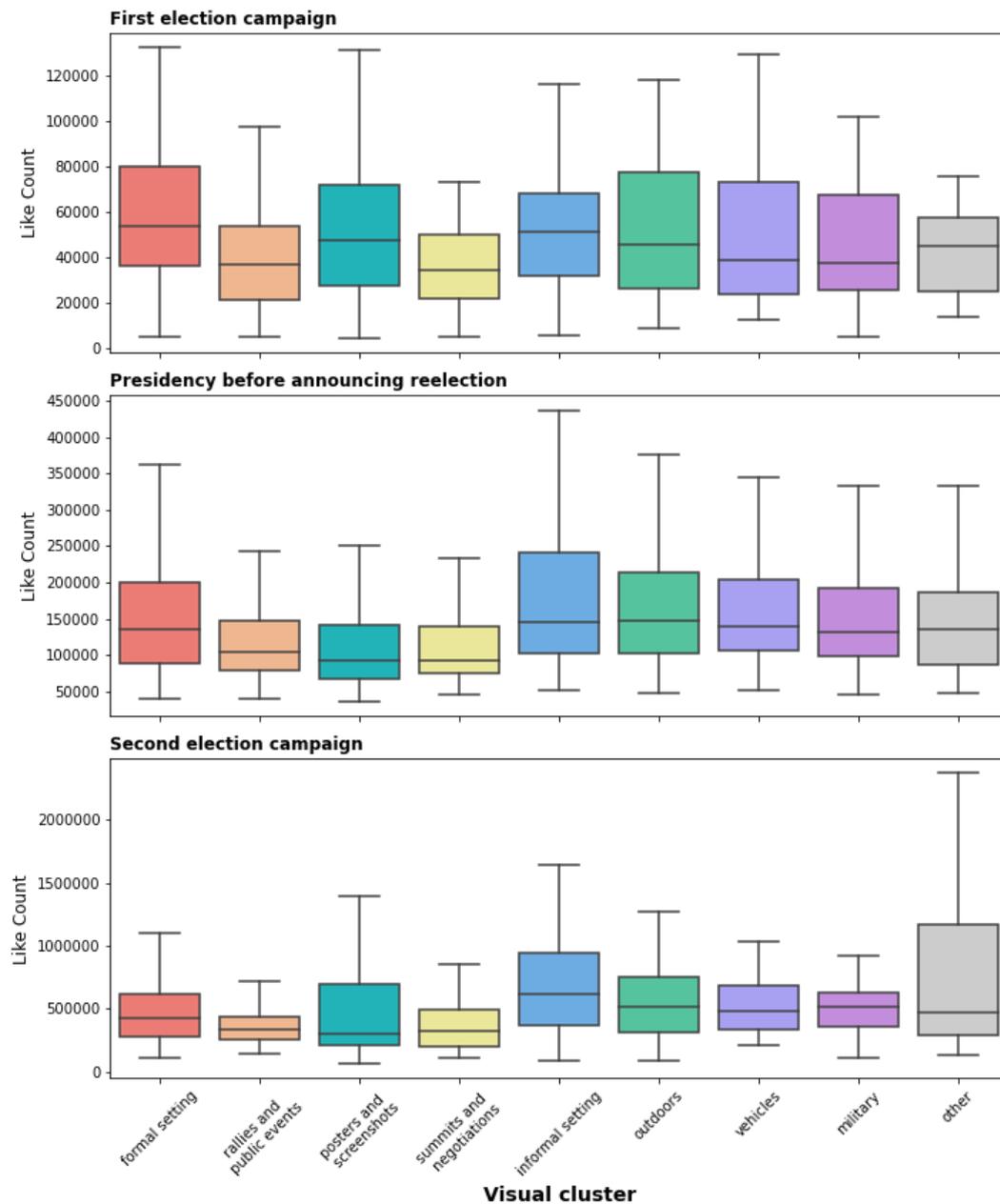
In 2020, as the time for his reelection campaign approached, rallies and public events took centre stage in his visual communication. Nearly 50% of his picture publications were taken in formal settings or at rallies, which reflected his campaigning and interactions with his political supporters.

Thus, the dynamics of D. Trump's visual communication demonstrate his strategic adaptation to different phases, including election campaigns, policy messaging, and audience engagement. The shifts in content focus highlight the evolving priorities and strategies in his visual communication over time.

## Engagement with Different Visual Clusters

In Figure 18, the distribution of likes across visual clusters is presented for three periods of D. Trump's political career: when he was a candidate, when he was the President, and when he was both the President and a candidate.

**Figure 18**  
*Distribution of Likes on Trumps' Posts Across Different Visual Clusters*



During his first election campaign, the clusters that received the highest average number of likes were formal settings, outdoors, posters, and vehicles. These clusters were particularly engaging for users. These clusters were visually appealing,

relatable, and associated with professionalism, authenticity, and personal branding. On the other hand, clusters depicting summits and negotiations, as well as rallies and public events, received a lower average number of likes, possibly due to their more serious or event-focused nature. The user preferences throughout this time demonstrate how crucial visual appeal, relatability, and personal connection are for promoting engagement on social media platforms.

During Trump's presidency, pictures taken in informal settings gained popularity due to their relatability and authenticity. These images likely showed Trump in more casual and everyday situations, which made him look more approachable and relatable to people. On the other hand, pictures of public events, posters, summits, and negotiations may have been less popular among users because they represented more formal and structured settings. These types of images may have been perceived as less relatable or less visually appealing to the broader audience. The preference for informal settings highlights the desire for a more personal and relatable connection with political figures on social media platforms.

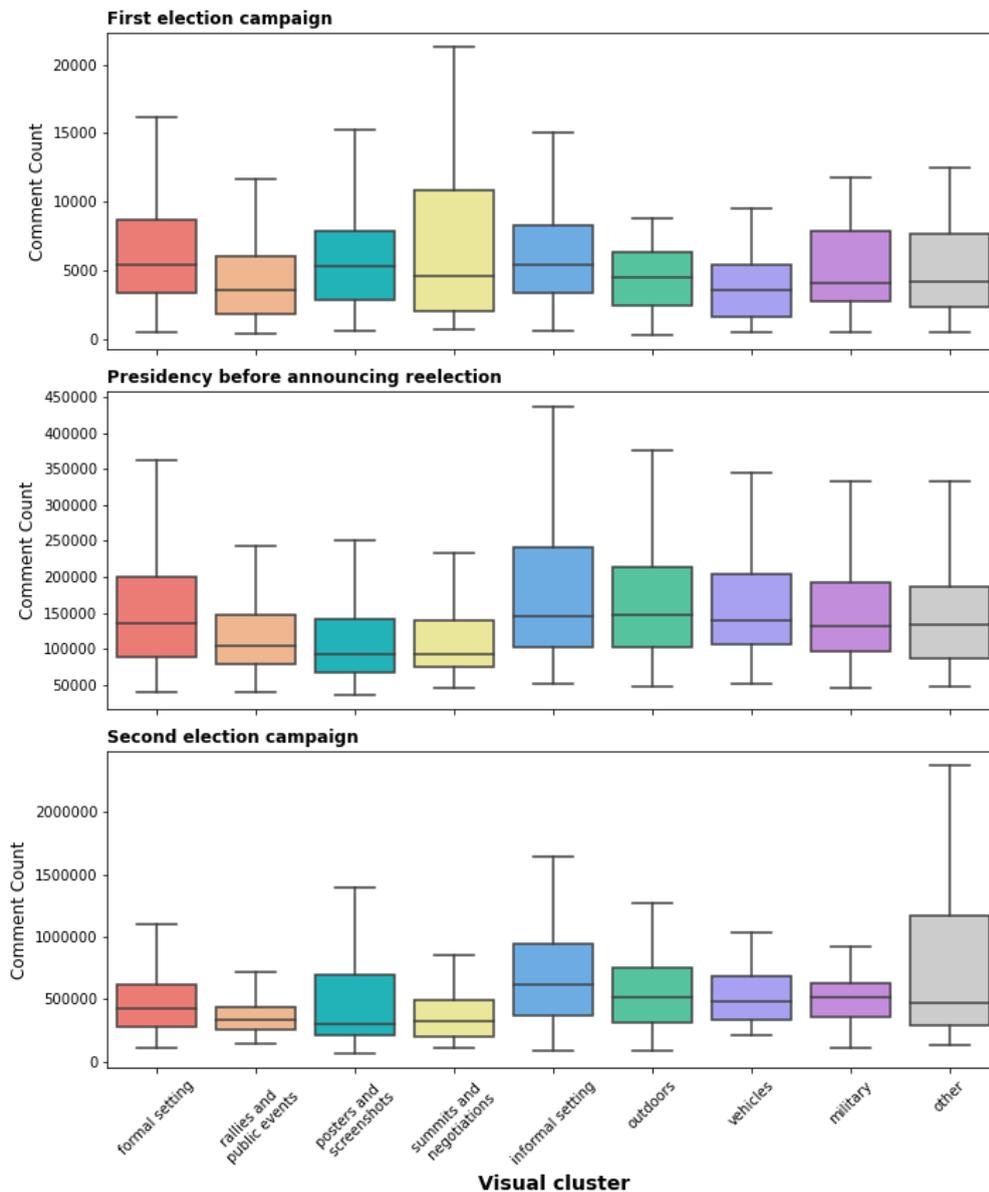
In the third period, when Trump was the President of the United States and was holding his reelection campaign, the most dominant visual cluster in terms of like count was the "other" cluster, which included non-standardized pictures taken in various settings. These pictures may have provided a unique and diverse visual experience for users, capturing their attention and generating interest. Additionally, informal settings continued to be popular, suggesting that users appreciated the more relaxed and authentic portrayal of Trump in everyday situations. Pictures taken in formal settings, including official events and ceremonies, may have been perceived as less relatable, so they were less engaging to users. The structured and staged nature of these images could have contributed to a lower level of user interaction. Similarly, pictures of rallies, summits, and negotiations, which are associated with political and formal contexts, might not have resonated as strongly with the user base. These factors could explain the comparatively lower level of user engagement with pictures in formal settings and political events.

To bring it all together, the analysis of average numbers of likes across visual clusters during different periods of Trump's political career reveals the users' diverse levels of engagement and preferences. It emphasises how crucial authenticity,

relatability, and visual appeal are to keeping people interested on social media platforms. Over time, there was a noticeable shift in the popularity of pictures taken in formal settings and informal settings. The comparative popularity of formal pictures appeared to decrease, while pictures taken in informal settings gained more popularity. According to this pattern, viewers have become less interested in pictures of formal occasions and more interested in seeing Donald Trump in ordinary situations.

During D. Trump's political career, the average number of comments under his pictures varied across different clusters (Figure 19).

**Figure 19**  
*Distribution of Comments on Trumps' Posts Across Different Visual Clusters*



In the first period, summits and negotiations were among the most commented clusters, indicating a high level of interest and engagement from users. Formal setting and informal setting clusters also received a significant number of comments, suggesting that users found posts with these images compelling and worth discussing.

In the second period, the cluster of posters and screenshots attracted a lot of comments on average, indicating that users were actively engaging with and discussing these visual materials. The formal setting and informal setting clusters were also close in terms of the average number of comments, with pictures in formal settings standing out as the most commented outliers during this period. This suggests that images from formal settings garnered attention and sparked conversations among users.

The third period saw the highest comments on postings with the category "other pictures", showing that users were engaged in the variety and non-standard types of images. Pictures taken in casual situations received more comments than those taken in formal settings, highlighting the popularity of more approachable and intimate visual content. Additionally, screenshots and images of posters remained captivating and attracted a significant number of comments.

The variations in comment activity across different clusters demonstrate the shifting nature of user interaction and the preferences of users at various points in D. Trump's political career. It implies that while some images, such as those showing summits and negotiations or taken in official settings, stimulated more conversation and participation, users also paid close attention to images taken in informal situations and other interesting sights. The comments under these pictures provided a platform for users to share their thoughts and opinions, as well as, engage in discussions related to D. Trump and his political activities.

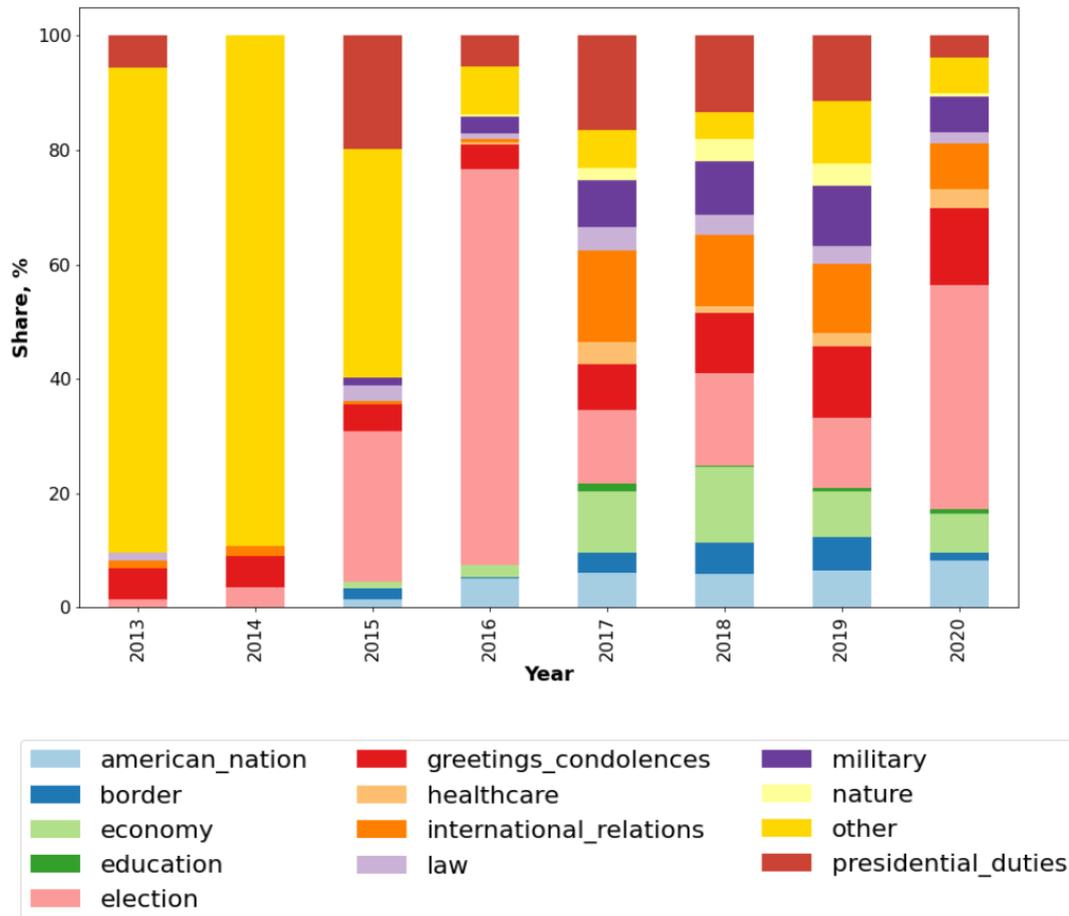
# Topic Modelling of Textual Content

## *Overview of Textual Clusters*

The topic modelling process combined quantitative text analysis and qualitative clustering based on human judgement. Using the probabilities (generated by BERTopic) of each caption belonging to a particular cluster, it was possible to divide all posts with captions (5812) into 96 small clusters (from 10 up to 180 observations in each). The number of clusters was not specified as a parameter in the model so as not to set limits on the algorithm and in the end, have numerous clusters which are diverse in topic and which vary in the number of assigned posts. The resulting number of clusters, 96, was too substantial to be used for interpretation in addition to some clusters being semantically close. Therefore, all clusters were then qualitatively merged into a total of 13 thematic categories based on frequent and unique keywords, determined by BERTopic, for each of the clusters (Figure 20). 2021 was not depicted due to the low number of posts during that year, hence, the shares of clusters would not provide an accurate representation of reality.

Starting from 2013 and 2014, the majority of posts during those years belonged to the category “other”, which means that those captions were largely non-political and concerned mostly with D. Trump’s life as a TV personality: promoting his shows or visiting late-night shows to give interviews. With the election approaching, Trump announced his candidacy in June of 2015 and immediately started campaigning online as evident by the 2015 bar. The presence of the category “presidential duties” in both the 2013 and 2015 datasets can be explained by the functionality of the algorithm as well as the naming of the category. This particular cluster in the years 2017 through 2020 contains a lot of posts about Trump travelling somewhere as part of a business trip or holding meetings with state officials, and since similar posts were present in 2013 and 2015, they were grouped by BERTopic.

**Figure 20**  
*The Dynamics of Trump's Textual Communication Over Time*



In 2016, the topic of the election naturally emerged as the primary focus of discussion for Trump with 60% of posts devoted to it and with him actively using the platform's capabilities to gain favour with voters. The majority of his election posts were dedicated to thanking different states after the rallies Trump had held there.

After the inauguration at the beginning of 2017, there was a noticeable shift in Trump's communication strategy. The start of his presidency marked the emergence and prevalence of such clusters as "military", "international relations" and "economy" as well as the increase of "presidential duties". The sustained presence of posts from the category "election" throughout Trump's presidency provided evidence to support the point of view that Trump was a permanent campaigner, as even after the election he continued the attacks on some of his political opponents, never ceasing to be a showman.

Posts concerning the topics “border” and “American nation” started to arise around 2016 as well. These concepts were crucial for Trump as a significant part of his election campaign revolved around nationalistic ideas, formulated as “To Make America Great Again”. The focus on the border and the American nation resonated with his supporters and served to highlight his stance on immigration, national security, and prioritising American interests (Campani et al., 2022; Schertzer & Woods, 2021). By centering his campaign around these themes, Trump aimed to appeal to those who shared his vision of protecting American values and revitalising the nation.

One of the main findings from the automated textual analysis is illustrated in Figure 18 and concerns the fact that the distribution of topics during Trump’s presidency in 2017, 2018, and 2019 was almost identical across all three years. Perhaps, this is an indication of a thoroughly thought-out strategy by the White House PR team who wished to strike the right balance between the topics allowing Trump to cover his presidential achievements in as many fields as possible. This strategic approach allowed Trump to effectively communicate his accomplishments and appeal to a broad audience, showcasing his administration's efforts across various policy areas.

Finally, as expected, with the upcoming election at the end of 2020, that year saw a substantial rise in “election” posts and a corresponding decline in posts of all other categories. This election campaign, however, did not turn out as successful for Trump as he lost the election at the end of 2020 and his Instagram account was blocked soon after that in January of 2021 with 2021 only having seen 7 of his posts.

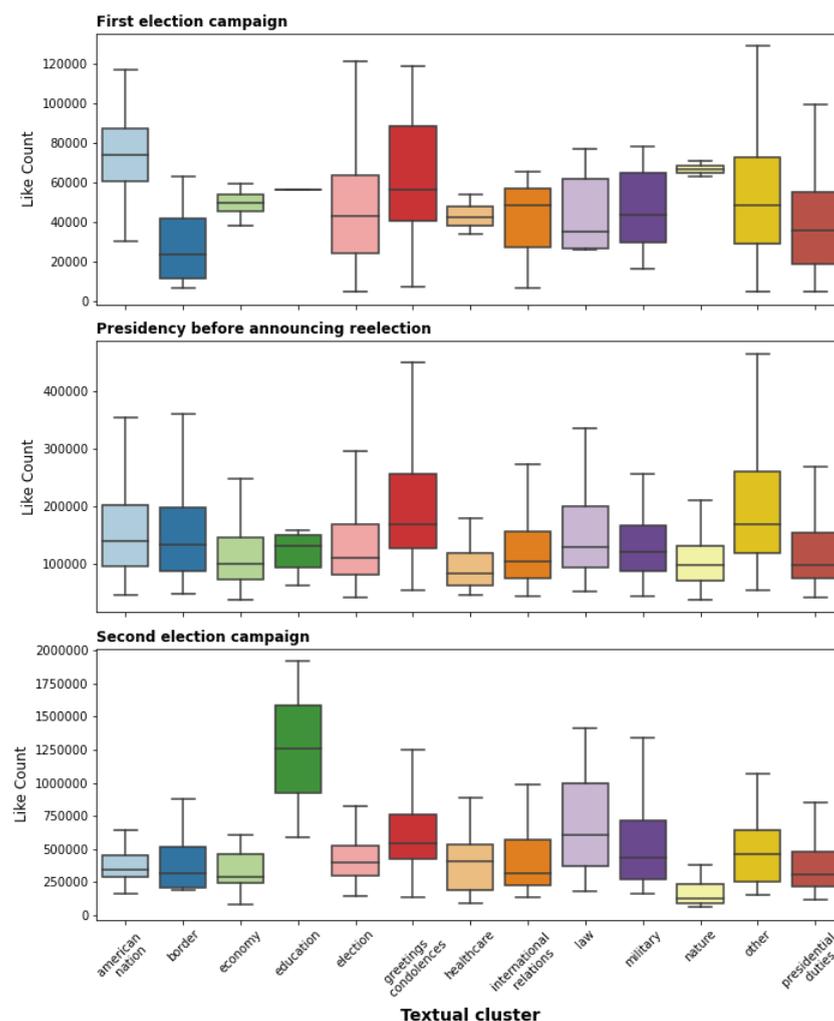
The analysis of Trump's Instagram posts reveals shifts in his communication strategy. Initially, he focused on non-political topics; however, after announcing his candidacy in 2015, he increased political content. Throughout his presidency, various topic clusters emerged, reflecting his engagement in governance. Moreover, the 2016 election became a central focus, with posts thanking states and continued attacks on opponents. Themes like "border" and "American nation" emphasised nationalist ideas. Furthermore, consistent topic distribution from 2017 to 2019 indicated a strategic approach. As the 2020 election approached, there was a noticeable increase in election-related posts; however, Trump ultimately lost, and his Instagram account was subsequently blocked in 2021. This analysis underscores the

evolving dynamics of Trump's verbal communication and the strategic use of social media in shaping political messaging.

### ***Engagement with Different Textual Topics***

The analysis of people's reactions towards different textual topics during Trump's candidacy and presidency reveals imbalances in the like counts (Figure 21). In the initial period when Trump was a candidate, there was a lack of structure in the like counts across various topics. The top categories that received a significant number of likes were "American nation" and "greetings and condolences". Additionally, topics like "economy", "nature", and "healthcare" attracted substantial engagement, with relatively balanced like counts.

**Figure 21**  
*Distribution of Likes on Trumps' Posts Across Different Textual Clusters*



During Trump's presidency, the most liked category was "greetings", which included posts featuring famous people and influencers. People are often drawn to content that involves well-known personalities, as they have a significant following and can attract attention and engagement from their fans or followers. "American nation" and "border" were also popular topics that received significant engagement. Trump's administration placed a strong emphasis on issues related to nationalism, immigration, and national security. These topics often evoke strong opinions and emotions among the public, leading to increased engagement and interest.

In the later period, education became a highly liked category, attracting a considerable number of likes on average. This increased engagement with education-related content could be attributed to the growing importance of educational policies and reforms during that time, with discussions surrounding school choice, funding, and student loans becoming prominent. "Law" and "military" also garnered substantial engagement, similar to the "greetings and condolences" category.

Overall, the analysis indicates variations in people's reactions to different textual topics throughout Trump's candidacy and presidency. Topics like "American nation", "greetings", and "education" consistently received higher levels of engagement, while others showed fluctuations in popularity.

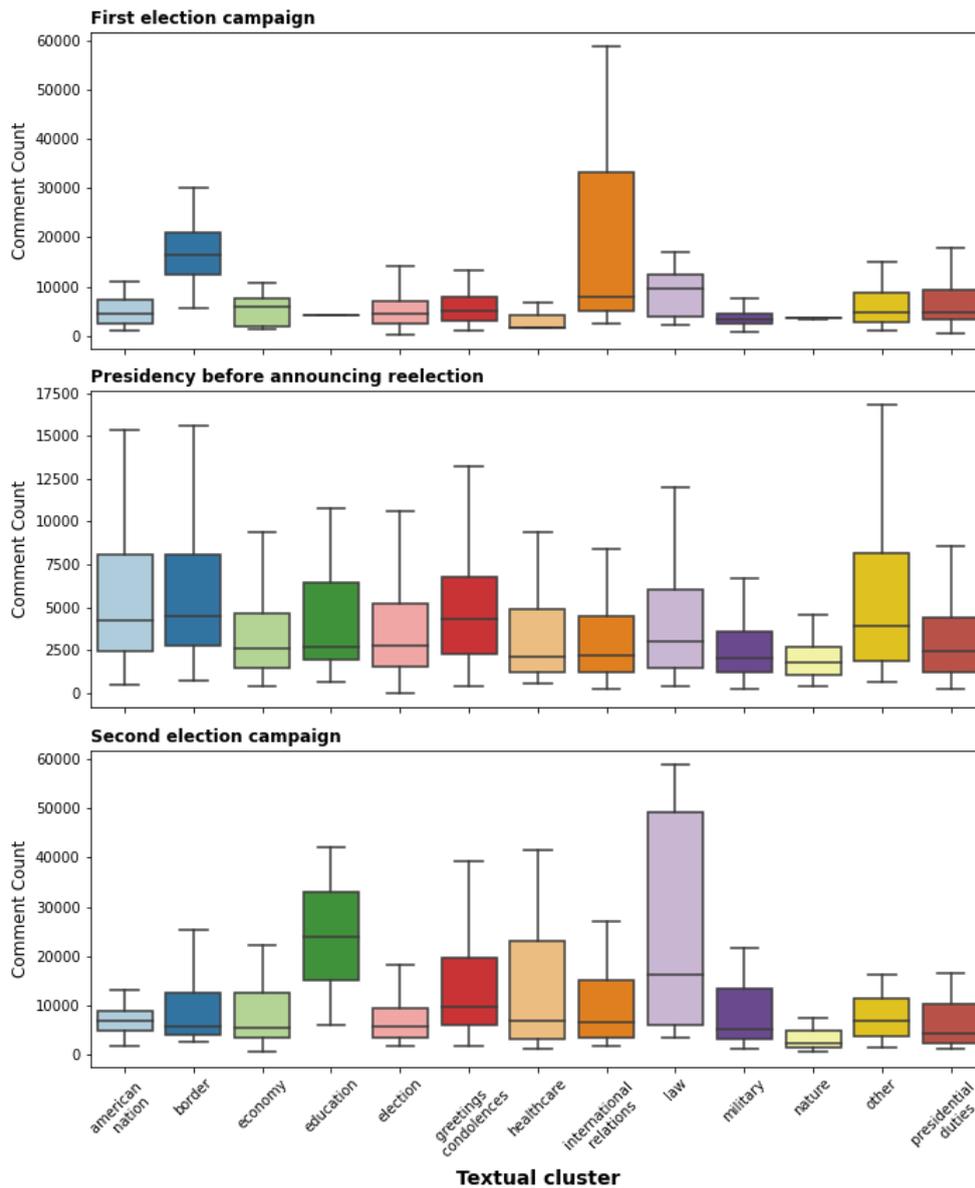
The distribution of comments across various categories during three periods of Trump's candidacy and presidency reveals a different pattern (Figure 22).

In the first period, the most commented category on average was "International relations", indicating a strong interest and engagement in discussions related to Trump's foreign policy and global affairs. This was followed by the "border" category, suggesting that the topic of immigration and border control generated substantial discussions and opinions.

During the second period, the comment narrative became more balanced across various categories. "American nation", "border", "greetings and condolences", "law",

and other topics received significant comment engagement. This balanced distribution of comments indicates a wider range of discussions and interests among the audience during Trump's presidency.

**Figure 22**  
*Distribution of Comments on Trump's Comments Across Different Textual Clusters*



In the third period, the most commented category shifted to "law", suggesting that legal matters and Trump's actions within the legal framework attracted considerable attention and sparked discussions, such as signing the withdrawal of the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017 or his Executive Order protecting American

Monuments, Memorials, and Statues in 2020. Additionally, categories like "education", "healthcare", and "greetings and condolences" also received substantial comment engagement, indicating the audience's interest in these policy areas and emotional responses to related content.

These patterns highlight the evolving dynamics of public engagement and the changing focus of discussions throughout Trump's candidacy and presidency. From international relations to border control, and a balanced distribution to legal matters and policy areas, the distribution of comments reflects the varying levels of public interest and the impact of different policy priorities and events during Trump's political journey.

## **Interrelation between Visual and Textual Content**

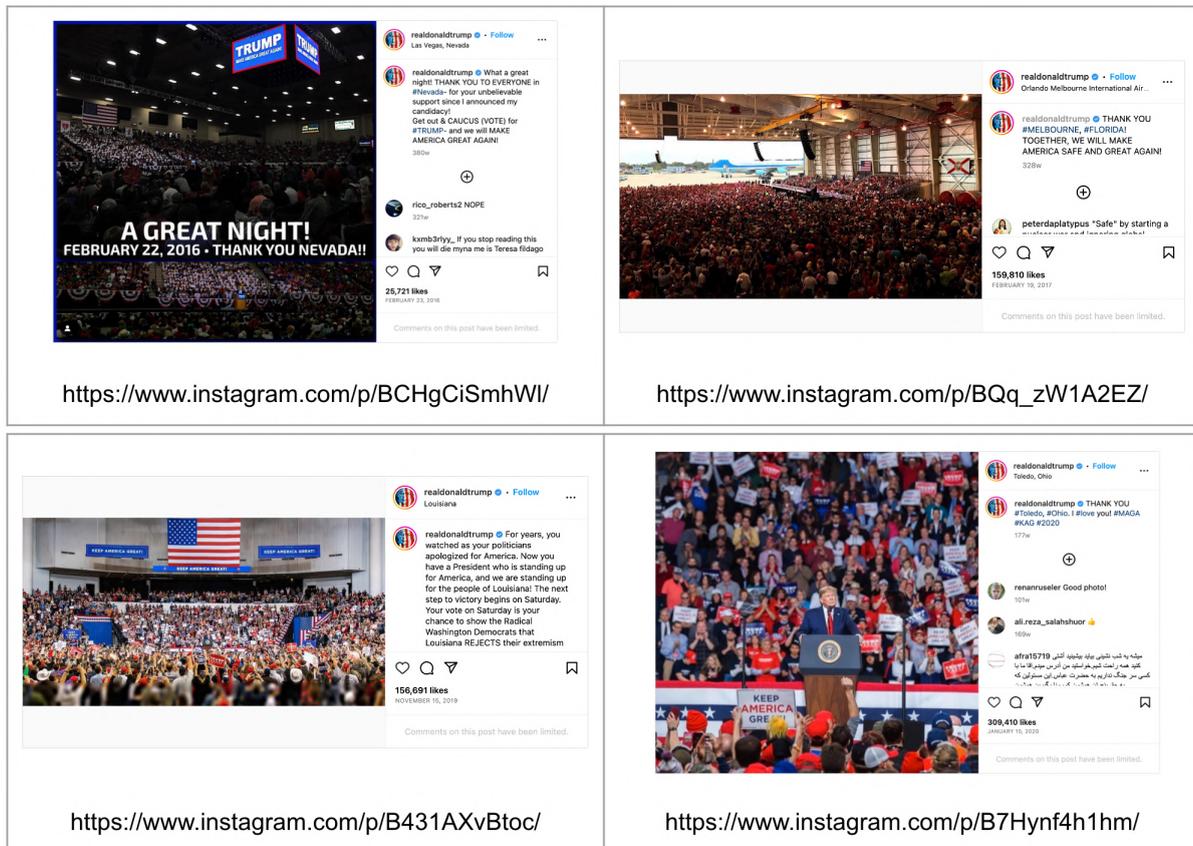
### ***Insights and Observations***

Automated visual and textual analysis of Donald Trump's posts on Instagram was conducted in previous chapters of the current research, however, social media users tend to perceive the content online holistically (Parmelee et al., 2022), hence, it is reasonable to merge the analysis of both types of content and examine the interrelation between thematic clusters of textual and visual content posted by D. Trump. The number of posts under investigation amounted to 3834 as the posts either with videos or without a textual caption were left out. The presented heatmap (Figure 23) sheds light on how Instagram posts' visual clusters and associated textual clusters relate to one another. By examining the distribution of captions across different visual clusters, we can gain a better understanding of the content alignment and thematic associations within the posts.



**Figure 24**

*Examples of Posts From the “Rallies and Public Events” Visual Cluster Alongside the Captions From the “Election” Textual Cluster*



It also reveals that the "election" cluster was linked to 40% of posts that included screenshots of tweets and photographs of campaign posters (Figure 25). This shows that the majority of these posts dealt with election-related material, such as political ads and campaign slogans distributed through posters and tweets. The frequency of these posts further emphasises how much attention is being paid to the election campaign and how visual components are being used to spread political messages and advance Trump's campaign.

**Figure 25**

*Examples of Posts From the “Posters and Screenshots” Visual Cluster Alongside the Captions From the “Election” Textual Cluster*

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BE35mpKmhVE/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BPaTAVDDAmq/>

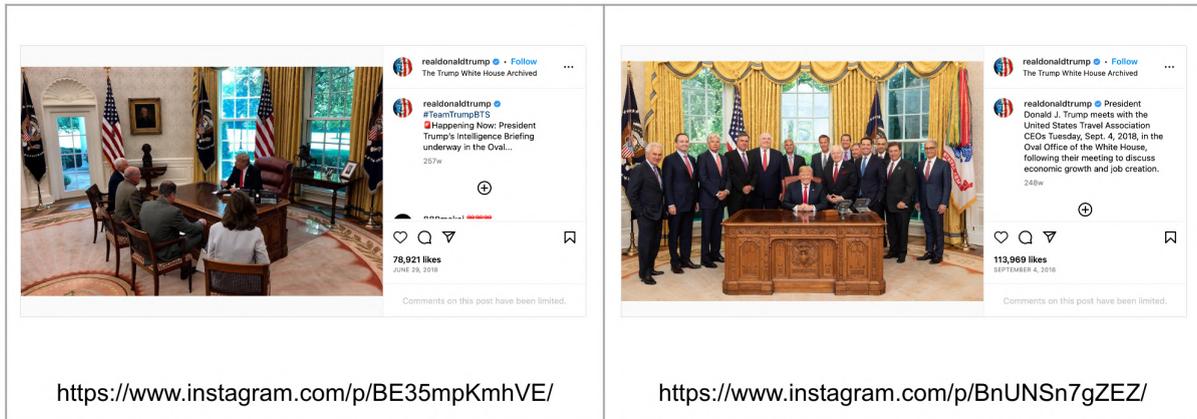
<https://www.instagram.com/p/B56nDzShsCq/>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CD4fJGvBNHy/>

Another notable observation is that images of meetings and negotiations regularly featured alongside captions referring to foreign relations or presidential duties (Figure 26). This suggests a conscious effort to match textual content that highlights D. Trump's participation in international affairs and his duties as President with graphic representations of diplomatic engagements and formal meetings. The posts probably had the intention of highlighting Trump's interactions with other leaders and his efforts to influence foreign policy.

## Figure 26

*Examples of Posts From the “Summits and Negotiations” Visual Cluster Alongside the Captions From the “International Relations” Textual Cluster*



Images taken in non-official situations, such as during vacations or private moments, were frequently linked to the linguistic cluster "other". This means that these posts, which frequently showed members of Trump's family or depicted his leisure activities, did not fall under any particular topic category like politics or international relations. Furthermore, a significant number of these postings also belonged to the "greetings and condolences" cluster, which may have indicated posts about sending individual greetings or expressing condolences on various events.

Moreover, images with a military theme were closely associated with texts with a military subject matter. These photos probably showed Trump's interactions with the military, military ceremonies, or other occasions and activities closely related to the army.

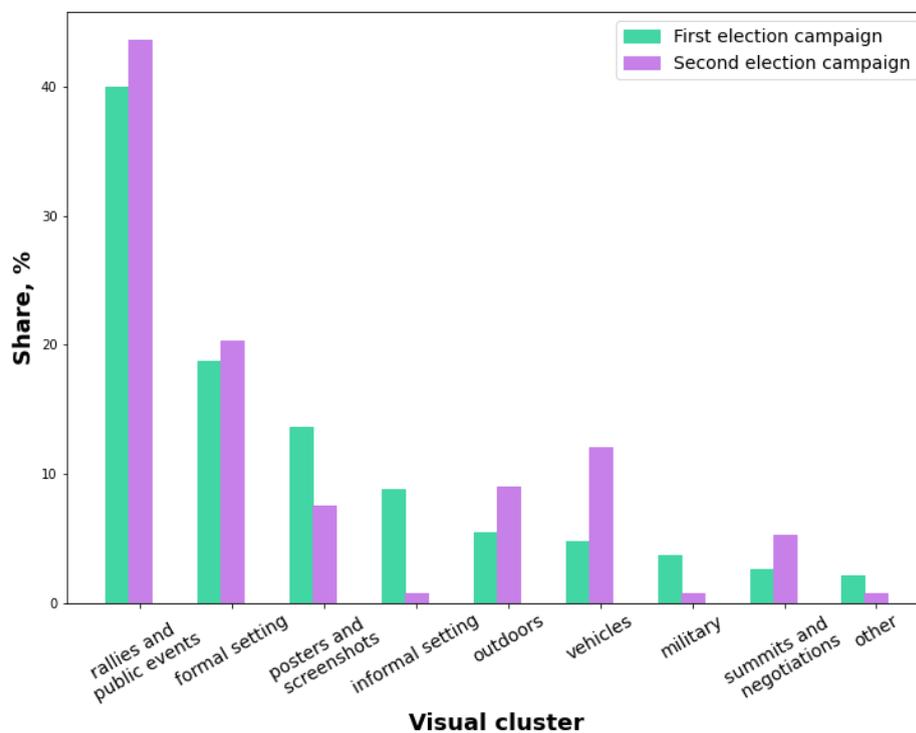
To sum up, the heatmap shows how particular visual content was frequently linked with captions from the same theme cluster, offering useful insights into the alignment between visual and textual clusters. These insights demonstrate the deliberate use of visual content in conjunction with textual captions to convey specific messages and reinforce particular themes.

## ***The Dynamics of the Visual Representation of the Textual Cluster "Election"***

The textual cluster "election" holds significant importance, and this section focuses on the dynamics of its visual representation (Figure 27). Notably, there were significant differences in the visual portrayal of certain topics during the first and second election campaigns.

**Figure 27**

*Comparison Chart Between Trump's Election Campaigns With the Textual Cluster "Election" as an Example*



During the second election campaign, rallies and public events, as well as formal settings, had a greater presence compared to the first campaign. The strategy attempted to highlight Trump's popularity and support within his base as well as to generate excitement and momentum behind his candidacy by increasing the visibility of rallies and public events. Additionally, the emphasis on formal settings points to a desire to depict Trump as an experienced and capable leader and to project a presidential image. This may take the shape of formal speeches, news conferences, or meetings where Trump might demonstrate his leadership skills and address important policy issues.

In the first election campaign, posters and screenshots were more frequently utilised as visual representations of election-related topics. These visual components were useful tools for communicating slogans, major policy stances, and campaign messaging. Posters and images were used to communicate clearly and effectively, capturing viewers' attention and promoting Trump's campaign. However, this trend shifted during the second campaign, where the use of such visuals diminished.

During the second election campaign, there was a significant decrease in the use of pictures in informal settings to represent election-related topics. Unlike the first campaign, where pictures were frequently utilised in informal settings to create a more personal and relatable connection with the audience, the second campaign took a different approach. This change may have been driven by various factors, including the campaign's evolving understanding of audience preferences and the desire to utilise more effective or campaign-centred content. A possible explanation for this change could be also attributed to a larger share of outdoor pictures during the second election campaign.

Additionally, there was a higher frequency of pictures featuring vehicles, including cars and modes of transportation, during the second election campaign.

Interestingly, compared to the second election campaign, during the first election campaign images relating to the military were used much more frequently. This difference could be attributed to various factors, including the campaign's messaging priorities, shifting political dynamics, and the strategic choices made to resonate with the target audience.

Furthermore, pictures depicting summits and negotiations played a more significant role in visualising election posts during the second campaign. This suggests a deliberate effort to use such visuals to highlight Trump's involvement in diplomatic engagements and his role in shaping international relations.

To conclude, the study uncovers different patterns and shifts in how election-related content is represented visually, showing a systematic approach to using visuals in alignment with specific campaign objectives and narratives during Trump's election campaigns.

## Chapter 6. Discussion

### Self-Representation of Donald Trump on Instagram

The theoretical framework of self-representation provides valuable insights into understanding Donald Trump's use of Instagram as a platform for projecting his desired image. Individuals engage in self-presentation to establish a favourable self-image or "role" that affects how others see them, as stated by Goffman (1956). In the case of D. Trump, it is possible to interpret his self-presentation on Instagram as an intentional attempt to build and support his idealised self-identity, particularly in the eyes of the public and his followers (Steffan, 2020).

The results of the computational textual analysis of Trump's Instagram posts (Figure 20) illustrate how his communication approach has changed over time, demonstrating his capacity to adapt to and effectively showcase his changing status. Trump's Instagram posts reflected these changes in status and priorities as he transitioned from being a businessman and TV personality to a political candidate and eventually the President of the United States. Trump's Instagram posts in 2013-2014 were mostly addressing non-political topics, which corresponded with his previous roles as a businessman and TV personality. However, there was an apparent rise in political content when he declared his candidacy for the presidency in 2015 as he sought to establish himself as a genuine competitor (Enli, 2017). Trump's Instagram posts throughout the 2016 election were predominantly focused on criticising his rivals and expressing gratitude to certain states, which is in line with research on his Twitter account (Schertzer & Woods, 2021). These messages were made to stimulate his supporters and project strength and determination during the campaign. Trump's Instagram posts from 2017 to 2020 during his presidency revealed an even distribution of themes, indicating a well-thought-out plan by the White House PR team. This approach attempted to find a balance between various topics, enabling Trump to highlight his accomplishments as president across a variety of sectors and successfully explain the initiatives of his administration to a large audience. However, there was a noticeable increase in "election" posts as the 2020 election got closer, coupled with a decrease in posts about other categories.

This change in subject matter reflected the increased attention being paid to the election campaign and Trump's efforts to win votes for his reelection bid.

Diving into the visual analysis of D. Trump's Instagram posts, it becomes apparent that his visual communication approach evolved and adapted to different statuses over time as well (Figure 17). In 2013 and 2014, Trump's Instagram posts had a balanced mix of professional and informal settings, often featuring outdoor scenes. But in 2015, formal settings, rallies, and public events began to take precedence over informal pictures and outdoor settings. This pattern persisted in the 2016 presidential campaign, demonstrating his efforts to engage his followers. A shift toward more posters, screenshots, and images from formal settings and negotiations in 2017 suggests a focus on policy and political actions. Similarly to the distribution of textual topics during this period, from 2018 to 2019 there was a more even distribution of themes in Trump's images, implying a highly strategic approach of the White House PR team. Rallies and other public events gained a major position in his visual marketing in 2020 as he prepared for reelection. Overall, the textual and visual analyses both show Trump's strategic adaptation to different "roles" to create images corresponding to his status.

The concept of "dramaturgical discipline" (Goffman, 1956) offers a theoretical framework for understanding Donald Trump's activity and his choice of published content. Considerable attention to managing one's digital image corresponds to Trump's communication strategy's rigorous planning and methodical approach shown by data analysis. The data findings (Figure 4) are consistent with the idea that Trump's Instagram activity exhibits dramaturgical discipline. It shows that the number of posts increases over time, showing a persistent and intentional attempt to keep a strong presence on the social media platform.

In addition, qualitative analysis of Trump's Instagram posts reveals recurring patterns, and narratives (Aiello, 2020) that were intentionally used to convey specific meanings during different periods, which is in line with the concept of "dramaturgical discipline". This shows the desire for Trump to uphold the social role he was playing and convey a particular image to his supporters. The goal of his first election campaign was to demonstrate his accomplishments as a candidate (Gingrich, 2017)

by developing a sense of widespread acceptability, popularity, and leadership, which was supported by recurring patterns. During the period of his presidency, Trump highlighted his authority by using pictures where he was signing documents or negotiating with political actors. These characteristics were observed as well by Strand & Schill (2019) in their analysis of his Twitter and Facebook and by Chun (2018) in images released by the White House on Flickr. Trump was also frequently reposting screenshots of important tweets on Instagram to assert his point of view, thus, demonstrating “dramaturgical discipline”. Another showcase of such discipline is his publication of crowd images and election posters after each of his rallies during the second election campaign. It is important to highlight that these posts were almost identical for all states with the same image and text, just a different state name. To sum up, Trump’s team was strategically using crowd images and election posters to appeal to voters in various states while emphasising political objectives and successes using phrases, slogans, and facts. These trends reveal Trump's systematic approach to establishing his digital brand.

## **Impact of Affordances of Instagram on Trump’s Communication Strategy and Public Reaction to His Messages**

Trump's communication approach and the public's response to his posts were significantly shaped by Instagram's affordances, a diverse array of communication techniques employed to fulfil a broad spectrum of communication needs and objectives (Smock et al., 2011). The platform's characteristics and capabilities gave Trump the chance to connect with his audience and effectively share his messages.

One notable impact of Instagram's affordances on Trump's communication strategy was the ability to combine visual and textual elements in his posts (Bossetta, 2018). The data (Figure 3) demonstrate that during 2016 and 2017, Trump frequently added captions to his posts, echoing his understanding of the value of delivering more information or messaging in addition to visual content. The use of only visual content in posts increased over time, indicating that the visual components alone started to be considered sufficient for successfully shaping his desired image. The data also

shows that especially starting in 2017, videos were an important part of Trump's Instagram communication strategy. However, it is crucial to highlight that videos have been excluded from this study due to methodological limitations.

The analysis of engagement patterns indicated significant differences in the distributions of likes and comments on D. Trump's Instagram posts.

As shown in Figure 5, the average number of likes on his posts demonstrated a steady rise since 2013, which was connected with the rise in his following base and overall social media prominence. Since Instagram does not have an "unlike" button, it is crucial to mention that the average number of likes does not always signify users' explicit support. However, it offers insights into the general interaction and engagement with Trump's posts on the platform. On the other hand, the dynamics of comments under Trump's Instagram posts followed a different trend compared to the number of likes, as shown in Figure 6. Despite a high frequency of posts in 2017 and 2018, those years witnessed the lowest number of comments. This may be explained by the fact that these years saw a rise in Trump's more formal and bureaucratic posts associated with his position as the President, hence, eliciting a less emotional reaction from people unlike in more turbulent times of election campaigns in 2015-2016 and 2019-2020, with 2020 especially registering the most remarks made on his Instagram posts. These findings highlight the fact that social media platform user engagement extends beyond simple popularity as determined by likes (Trevisan et al., 2019). The dynamics of comments illustrate the complexity of user participation by reflecting a more nuanced and involved connection with Trump's posts.

## **Agenda-Setting on Trump's Instagram**

According to Gilardi et al. (2022), agenda-setting refers to the process in which candidates highlight certain issues, making them more prominent and neglecting others. The computational analysis of captions was conducted to understand the agenda-setting approach of Trump and determine the issues he focused on. The analysis categorised all textual messages into 13 thematic categories using BERTopic, based on frequent and unique keywords. This approach allowed for a

comprehensive understanding of the topics that received attention from Trump and potentially influenced the salience of these issues among his followers and potential voters.

Trump primarily focused on setting the agenda for his presidential campaign and ensuing presidency. Following are the key flaws that were discovered after analysing captions added to his Instagram posts:

1. The transition from TV Personality to Political Candidate: In 2015, after declaring his candidacy for president, Trump changed his attention to political content and aggressively campaigned online. He made use of the platform to appeal to voters (Steffan, 2020), spending a significant portion of his posts talking about the election.
2. Emphasis on Presidential Responsibilities: Following his inauguration in 2017, Trump's communication approach changed significantly. His posts reflected the emphasis on presidential duties by increasing the prominence of categories like "military", "international relations", and "economy". The presence of posts on the "election" further suggested that he continued to campaign even after winning, which supports the idea of him being a "permanent campaigner" (Morini, 2020).
3. Nationalistic themes: Trump began including references to the "border" and "American nation" in his Instagram posts around 2016. These beliefs were essential to his campaign since they complemented his nationalistic beliefs and the motto "Make America Great Again", disseminated on other platforms as well (Schertzer & Woods, 2021) Trump tried to win over followers who shared his goal of upholding American values and reviving the country by focusing on problems relating to immigration, national security, and American interests.
4. Balanced Distribution of Themes: The analysis showed that from 2017 to 2019 when Trump was president, there was a balanced distribution of topics. This shows that the White House PR team has a well-planned strategy to promote Trump's accomplishments as president while covering a wide range of policy issues.

5. Focus on the 2020 Election: As the election date approached, there was a sharp rise in "election" posts and a corresponding fall in posts from other categories. This change in subject matter demonstrated the increased focus on the election campaign and Trump's efforts to gain support for his reelection campaign.

## **Visual Framing**

Each textual message was accompanied by a picture to enhance the visual appeal and capture the attention of viewers. All pictures were computationally clustered into 9 thematic categories. Following an approach developed by Grabe and Bucy (2009) such visual frames as "the ideal candidate" and "the populist campaigner" can be identified.

Trump was intended to be portrayed as a statesman and a compassionate leader in "the ideal candidate" visual framework. Clusters like "formal setting", "military", "summits and negotiations", and "vehicles" provided representations for this frame. Images of formal settings, military engagements, diplomatic gatherings, and transportation were used to create a feeling of competence, leadership, and authority.

On the other hand, the portrayal of Trump as "the populist campaigner" highlighted his ordinariness and mass popularity. Clusters like "rallies and public events", "informal setting", and "outdoors" can be used to illustrate this frame. Images of Trump interacting with the public at events, in casual settings, and outdoor settings were posted to portray him as personable, down to earth, and understanding of people's issues.

**Figure 28**  
*Comparison Chart Between Trump's Election Campaigns in Terms of Framing Strategies*

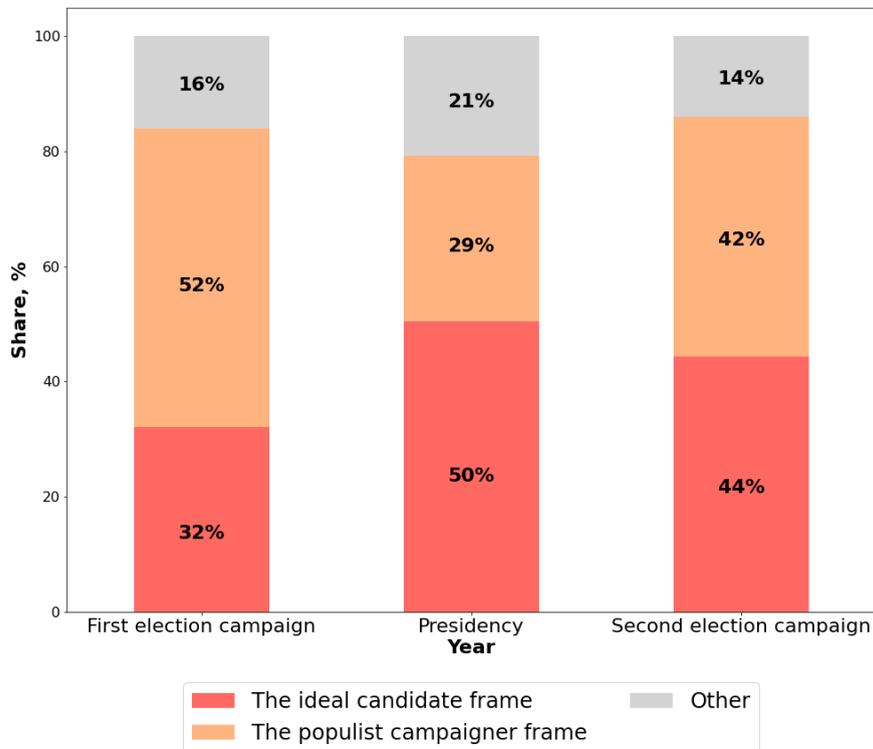


Figure 28 illustrates the distribution of Trump's posts across two frames: the "ideal candidate" frame and the "populist campaigner" frame, the data suggests that Trump's framing on Instagram varied across the described three periods.

In his initial election campaign, the populist campaigner frame was dominant, constituting 52% of his posts, aligning with his strategy to appeal to a broader base. The ideal candidate frame at the time accounted for 32%. Throughout the years 2017 and 2018, when Trump served as President, there was a noticeable increase in posts reflecting the ideal candidate frame, potentially aimed at projecting a more presidential image, with the ideal candidate frame increasing to 50% and the populist campaigner frame decreasing to 29%. In the third period, characterised by Trump simultaneously serving as President and campaigning for reelection, the two frames were nearly equal, with the ideal candidate frame at 44% and the populist campaigner frame at 42%, indicating a balancing act between the two personas. It gives potential insights into the reasons why his second election campaign was less successful (Elder & Lees-Marshment, 2022).

## Public Response to Trump's Agenda and Framing

The analysis of how people engaged with various textual issues throughout Trump's presidential campaigns and afterwards indicates a variety of trends. At first, there were disparities in the like counts, with "American nation" and "greetings and condolences" being the most popular categories. Due to their associations with well-known people and nationalistic themes, topics including "greetings", "American nation", and "border" gained a lot of likes while Trump was president. Significant engagement was also attained by the armed forces, law, and education. Early times of the comments' distribution across categories had a focus on international relations and border control, while later periods saw a more even distribution with a focus on law, education, and policy issues. These findings demonstrate how the dynamics of the public interest have changed over time, as well as the effects of various policy agendas across Trump's political career.

As for the visual content, the highest average number of likes was given to visually appealing clusters during Trump's campaign, including formal settings, the outdoors, posters, and vehicles, whereas fewer likes were given to clusters showing serious or event-focused situations. Due to their relatability and authenticity, photos taken in casual situations gained popularity throughout his term as president whereas photos taken at formal events had lower engagement. The most liked photos in a variety of settings were those that were not strictly standardised when Trump was running for President and President, and casual settings continued to be popular.

Summits, negotiations, official and informal settings, posters, and screenshots all received a lot of comments from users throughout various periods. During Trump's presidency, posters and screenshots received more comments, while informal settings consistently remained popular.

In conclusion, the empirical investigation of how individuals interacted with D. Trump's textual and visual content demonstrates shifting tendencies in the issues that were popular. It draws attention to the impact of nationalistic themes, the appeal of relatable and authentic visual content, and the audience's changing priorities and interests throughout time.

## Public Opinion Formation with Instagram

The repetition of frames and patterns, whether visual or textual, can indeed have a significant impact on shaping an individual's opinions (Chong & Druckman, 2007). This potential impact on public opinion is magnified when it comes to platforms like Instagram, where text and visual content are combined.

The relationship between the visual and textual elements of posts about Trump's campaigns and presidency is shown to follow some patterns:

1. Posts talking about protests and public events typically had captions from the "election" cluster, demonstrating the close relationship between images and discussions about elections. These posts emphasised organising support, endorsing candidates, and communicating campaign messages.
2. The "election" cluster was also connected to posts that included screenshots of tweets and campaign posters, demonstrating the frequency with which these posts contained election-related content.
3. Images of meetings and negotiations were often paired with captions referencing foreign relations or presidential duties, suggesting a deliberate effort to align visual representations of diplomatic engagements with textual content emphasising Trump's involvement in international affairs.
4. Images taken in non-official settings, such as on vacation or in private, were frequently linked to the textual cluster "other". These posts, which frequently featured members of Trump's family or his leisure activities, did not fall under any one particular topic category.
5. Textual content focusing on military topics was closely correlated with images with a military theme. These images showed how Trump interacted with the military and participated in military ceremonies.

Important insights into the dynamics and changes in visual portrayal during Trump's election campaigns can be gained from the examination of visual representations in the "election" cluster.

1. Compared to the first election campaign, the second election campaign put more emphasis on rallies, public events, and formal settings. This tactic attempted to emphasise Trump's appeal, spark interest, and convey a presidential image, by appealing to people (Moffitt, 2022).
2. Posters and screenshots were often utilised in the first campaign to visually portray election-related subjects, effectively communicating campaign messaging, policy stances, and slogans. The second campaign saw a decline in their use.
3. In comparison to the previous campaign, pictures taken in casual settings - which attempted to establish a personal and sympathetic relationship with the audience - were less common. This change could be a result of changing audience tastes and an emphasis on more powerful or campaign-specific content.
4. The first campaign, in contrast, featured military imagery more frequently, which may have been a result of changed messaging priorities.
5. During the second campaign, images of summits and negotiations were more frequently used to graphically express election positions, emphasising Trump's participation in diplomatic activities and his influence over global politics.

In conclusion, Instagram plays a significant role in shaping public opinion, providing politicians with the possibility to combine visual and textual content. The relationship between images and captions on Instagram posts about Trump's campaigns and presidency demonstrates patterns and clusters that contribute to public opinion formation.

## **Contributions to the Field**

The study offers a comprehensive research design and robust method of investigation that can be used to analyse data from any social platform, although there may be restrictions on content scraping capabilities, depending on the website. A prospective framework for assessing both visual and textual content is provided by this design, and it can be used for a variety of tasks like researching political messages or other types of social media messaging.

The study applies cutting-edge methods that represent the latest developments in machine learning as of the study's date. These techniques give academics state-of-the-art tools for investigating communication, enabling them to take advantage of the analytical capacity of machine learning algorithms. This approach allows for the analysis of an enormous number of objects, textual and visual ones, and this task would be impossible to complete manually. At the same time, a manual analysis may also be biased, while machine learning models remain relatively objective and robust.

This study is the first to shed light on Donald Trump's communication style across the full course of his Instagram activities, encompassing both his activity on Instagram before entering politics and his posts while campaigning and in office. It provides useful insights into Trump's communication strategies, especially during the understudied second election campaign. This study helps to understand how social media was used during the 2020 election and how that election was shaped because of them.

It is exceptional in the realm of political communication for a study to concentrate on both textual and visual content analysis together. This study examines the implications of comprehending the combination of visual and textual elements in political communication because a social media post consists of a coherent message that is not only conveyed through text but is also presented graphically.

The study also looks into audience engagement patterns, demonstrating how the audience responded to Trump's messages on various topics. This is essential for understanding both the Instagram audience and American culture, its values, and its interests throughout history. The study offers important insights into the effect and reception of Trump's statements and visual frames by examining audience engagement.

Overall, this study's strengths lie in its comprehensive research design, use of cutting-edge methods, unique insights into Trump's communication strategy, analysis of visual and textual content, and exploration of audience engagement patterns.

# Chapter 7. Conclusion

## Summary of Key Findings

In summary, the study on Donald Trump's self-representation on Instagram provides valuable insights into how he strategically utilised the platform to shape public opinion and project his desired image. After applying the theoretical framework of self-representation, it becomes clear that Trump carefully curated his Instagram posts to establish and reinforce his idealised self-identity, particularly in the eyes of the public and his followers.

The current work provides a novel methodological approach and shows how machine learning can be adapted to uncover insights in the field of political communication. The analysis of Trump's textual and visual content illustrates his evolving style of communication. His Instagram images showed how his roles had changed over time, from businessman to television personality to political candidate to ultimately president of the United States. He made an effort to establish himself as a credible contender by notably increasing the political content after announcing his candidacy. Trump's posts during the 2016 presidential campaign were mostly concerned with aggressively campaigning online and exuding dominance. The posts throughout his presidency displayed a fair distribution of themes, showcasing his successes and outlining the policies of his government. The substantial increase in "election" posts as the 2020 election drew near shows Trump's intentional emphasis on winning support for his reelection campaign.

Trump's communication approach and the public's reaction were greatly influenced by Instagram's features. Trump was able to effectively communicate his ideas by combining text and images, with a rising emphasis on visual content over time. Likes and comments provided proof of user engagement patterns, which revealed the complex dynamics of audience participation. Likes showed a more casual exchange, whereas comments showed more complex and intricate relationships with Trump's posts.

The study also explored agenda-setting on Trump's Instagram, revealing the issues he prioritised and the frames through which he presented himself. From his transition to a political candidate to his emphasis on presidential responsibilities, nationalist themes, and a balanced distribution of topics during his presidency, Trump strategically shaped the agenda to align with his objectives. Visual framing analysis identified two main frames: "the ideal candidate" and "the populist campaigner", portraying Trump as a statesman and a relatable leader, respectively. The distribution of posts within these frames varied over time, reflecting Trump's evolving strategies.

The public's response to Trump's agenda and framing demonstrated shifting patterns of interest and engagement. The popularity of specific thematic categories, such as "American nation" and "greetings and condolences", aligned with nationalist themes and the mentioning of well-known individuals. The dynamics of likes and comments indicated changes in public interest and priorities, influenced by various policy agendas and the evolving political landscape.

In essence, this study sheds light on the potential impact of repetitive frames and patterns in shaping public opinion, particularly on platforms like Instagram that incorporate visual and textual content. Trump's strategic adaptation to different roles, combined with Instagram's features, enabled him to effectively convey his desired image, engage with his audience, and shape public perception. This study is especially relevant, given that Donald Trump announced his candidacy for the 2024 election in November of 2022 and even got unbanned on Instagram in January of 2023.

## **Limitations**

The study has several limitations that should be considered.

Firstly, the research focuses solely on the visual content of Donald Trump's Instagram account, specifically analysing the published pictures. Due to technological restrictions and data scraping limits, this method does not include video content or Instagram Stories. As a result, important insights that may have

been gained from these other types of content are missed. The omission of video content is particularly important because it frequently plays a key role in campaigning and communication strategies.

Another limitation is that the study only analyses Donald Trump's Instagram page and does not compare it with the content published by other politicians. This lack of comparative analysis makes it difficult to identify special traits or tactics in Trump's communication and restricts the capacity to understand political communication dynamics more broadly. For instance, it would be interesting to compare Trump's approach with those of the other candidates during election campaigns.

Moreover, the research design proposed in this study is a novel framework specifically applied to analysing Donald Trump's communication. Although it provides insightful information, the approach's generalizability is constrained by the lack of validation or application to different political leaders or settings.

Lastly, the study's focus solely on Instagram communication presents a limitation in terms of its cross-platform nature. Understanding communication patterns and strategies across multiple platforms could provide additional insights and specific nuances related to each platform's dynamics and audience engagement.

Taking into account these limitations, future research should seek to incorporate a more thorough analysis of various content types, comparative studies with other politicians, validation of the proposed framework using various datasets, and exploration of communication strategies across various social media platforms to provide a more comprehensive understanding of political communication in the digital age.

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## Appendix

### Extract of the Dataset

| Image_BaseName                                      | Caption  | comment Count | likeCount | pubDate                  | GV_lab   | text_category  | visual_cluster           | Post_url  |
|---|--|---------------|-----------|--------------------------|--|----------------|--------------------------|---|
| 16789563_1884168278490803_4004289217986297856_n.jpg | Thank you to the great presidents of our #HBCUs for their commitment to higher #education. Read more here: <a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/27/icymi-president-trump-seeks-outdo-obama-backing-black-college-students">https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/27/icymi-president-trump-seeks-outdo-obama-backing-black-college-students</a> | 2723          | 132115    | 2017-02-28T03:11:26.000Z | Clothing; Outerwear; Property; Coat; Couch; Dress; Interior design; Lighting; Architecture; Suit | education      | summits and negotiations | <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/BRCirTJgMbv/">https://www.instagram.com/p/BRCirTJgMbv/</a> |
| 20904977_111527059550057_3359463018806116352_n.jpg  | We're fulfilling another campaign promise by taking firm steps to PROTECT the intellectual property of American companies and American workers. #AmericaFirst #USA   | 10579         | 66439     | 2017-08-15T19:16:26.000Z | Clothing; Tie; Coat; Sharing; Font; Suit; Formal wear; White-collar worker; Blazer; Event        | economy        | official setting         | <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/BX02qJRgtlz/">https://www.instagram.com/p/BX02qJRgtlz/</a> |
| 36149533_163657497828950_3576990403540287488_n.jpg  | #TeamTrumpBTS 🇺🇸 Happening Now: President Trump's Intelligence Briefing underway in the Oval...  | 1667          | 81547     | 2018-06-29T15:51:23.000Z | Furniture; Table; Picture frame; Property; Chair; Houseplant; Flag; Coat; Interior               | president_life | summits and negotiations | <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/BknT-jigB8m/">https://www.instagram.com/p/BknT-jigB8m/</a> |

|   |  |       |        |                                  |   |                             |                              |   |
|---|--|-------|--------|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---|
|   |  |       |        |                                  | design;<br>Curtain  |                             |                              |   |
| 41463869<br>_2137311<br>31319764<br>2_581944<br>36564498<br>49478_n.j<br>pg | "Remarks by President Trump to the<br>73rd Session of the United Nations<br>General Assembly"<br><a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/LeUYsH">45.wh.gov/LeUYsH</a>  | 3068  | 112870 | 2018-09-25<br>T17:27:42.<br>000Z | Clothing;<br>Chair;<br>Lighting; Coat;<br>Podium; Suit;<br>Interior<br>design;<br>Projection<br>screen;<br>Entertainment;<br>Musical<br>instrument<br>accessory | international_r<br>elations | rallies and public<br>events | <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/BoKE9FHA-PI/">https://www.instagram.com/p/BoKE9FHA-PI/</a> |
| 44847259<br>_3367386<br>87150808<br>_7172209<br>14264946<br>1624_n.jp<br>g  | #Repost @laraleatrump<br>...<br>#NationalChristmasTreeLighting 🌲   | 1870  | 152110 | 2018-11-29<br>T01:39:43.<br>000Z | Face; Smile;<br>Skin;<br>Outerwear;<br>Hairstyle; Eye;<br>Eyebrow;<br>Facial<br>expression;<br>Product;<br>Organ  | greetings_con<br>dolences   | unofficial setting           | <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/BqvwloXFJrX/">https://www.instagram.com/p/BqvwloXFJrX/</a> |
| 17439240<br>_7074754<br>39416021<br>_2004657<br>95084032<br>4096_n.jp<br>g  | #Repost @ivankatrump<br>...<br>Meet Maria Martinez, Founder and CEO<br>of Respira Inc., one of the largest<br>providers of clinical respiratory and sleep<br>services and home medical equipment.<br>Maria's company was born out of a<br>shelter for women victims of domestic<br>violence. She was determined to start | 28278 | 134388 | 2017-03-21<br>T22:08:48.<br>000Z | Smile; Sleeve;<br>Standing;<br>Happy;<br>Gesture;<br>Waist; Thigh;<br>Fashion<br>design;<br>Friendship;<br>Event  | healthcare                  | unofficial setting           | <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/BR6ph_3gOkw/">https://www.instagram.com/p/BR6ph_3gOkw/</a> |

|   |   |       |        |                                  |   |          |                           |   |
|---|---|-------|--------|----------------------------------|---|----------|---------------------------|---|
|   | her company to support people like her father, who suffer from respiratory illnesses. Maria, you inspire me! Thank you for sharing your story. #USHCC #WomensEmpowerment #WomensHistoryMonth #Latergram   |       |        |                                  |   |          |                           |   |
| 27880465_406902003055711_5203757005461782528_n.jpg  | MEDAL OF VALOR-<br><br>To the heroes we are celebrating today: WELCOME to the White House. And to the families who are here with you – each of you also serves and sacrifices for your country. So thank you all. We are gathered here today to recognize 12 extraordinary law enforcement officers and first responders, and to award them the MEDAL OF VALOR. | 4339  | 84703  | 2018-02-20<br>T21:05:52.<br>000Z | Outerwear;<br>Coat; Curtain;<br>Chair; Suit;<br>Flag; Formal wear; Crowd;<br>Event; Tie           | military | summits and negotiations  | <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/BfbtbGggIEJ/">https://www.instagram.com/p/BfbtbGggIEJ/</a>   |
| 30076407_1863326047013023_1276002884919492608_n.jpg | #Repost @foxnews<br>...<br>Earlier today, President @realDonaldTrump tweeted about bolstering security at our southern border.  | 6541  | 153200 | 2018-04-07<br>T21:51:13.<br>000Z | World;<br>Human; Coat;<br>Tie; Font; Suit;<br>Microphone;<br>Adaptation;<br>Blazer; Poster        | border   | official setting          | <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/BhSPLbxAvDI/">https://www.instagram.com/p/BhSPLbxAvDI/</a>   |
| 80471600_169705867725202_7119942437353816529_n.jpg  | Democrats are now the party of high taxes, high crime, open borders, late-term abortion, socialism, and blatant corruption. The Republican Party is the party of the American Worker, the American Family, and the American Dream! #KAG2020 #MAGA   | 12280 | 410762 | 2020-01-10<br>T02:16:30.<br>000Z | Product;<br>World; Fan;<br>Gesture;<br>Player; Field house; Red;<br>Hat; T-shirt;<br>Championship | election | rallies and public events | <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/B7Hz4MyB Bmx/">https://www.instagram.com/p/B7Hz4MyB Bmx/</a> |

**Source: own work, the full dataset can be found at this link: [https://github.com/irlavrov/master\\_thesis](https://github.com/irlavrov/master_thesis)**