Visuals of Politics: Visual Political Communication Strategies at Social Media Platforms at the Hungarian Elections since 2010[1]

1 Thesis research plan at the first year of the PhD program.

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To what extent do the Hungarian political actors use Facebook and Instagram for sharing images and what kind of strategies can be identified? Do they share details of their private lives? Does the personalisation appear in the visual political communication of the Hungarian political actors? The aim of the research is to answer these questions, identify and compare the visualcommunication strategies of Hungarian parties and politicians by investigating political images published on Facebook and Instagram during four election campaigns (2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022). The thesis has a special focus on the presence of personalisation: whether the emphasis of the social media-based visual political communication has shifted to the politicians instead of parties in the case of Hungary. In order to answer the research questions different methods will be applied. Firstly, a combination of inductive and deductive qualitative content analysis is useful to study the quantifiable visual messages and the characteristics of Facebook and Instagram images. Additionally, social semiotics is a proper choice to analyse aspects that are not quantifiable, since it investigates the details of the images - such as the frames, metaphors, discourses, genre, style, modality and composition - that create the meanings, but with a special attention on the cultural and social landscape where the signs exist. One of the expected results is to show the effects and implications of social media-based political image-making in Hungary: considering that visual political communication can be characterised by personalization on social media platforms, it is an interesting question how the image-based political communication and personalization appears in Hungary's party-centred political system. Furthermore knowing how political actors and parties frame themselves on the social media, images can help better understand how they address voters on different platforms: whether they personalise their communication, or use it for mobilisation, show qualities like friendliness, or create the image of a strong, professional politician.

KEYWORDS

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