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Social media presence, active political participation. An empirical research report on the effects of a politician's social activities

Obecność w mediach społecznościowych oraz aktywny udział w życiu politycznym. Raport z badań empirycznych nad skutkami działań społecznych polityków

Słowa kluczowe: społeczeństwo, media społecznościowe, interaktywność, personalizacja, polityka, głosowanie, skutki działań społecznych polityków

Keywords: society, social media, interactivity, personalization, politics, voting, the effects of politicians' social activities

Streszczenie

Niniejsze badanie ma na celu zbadanie związku między obecnością polityki w mediach społecznościowych a aktywnymi intencjami obywatelskimi w zakresie partycypacji politycznej. W tym badaniu obecność w mediach społecznościowych mierzy się za pomocą interaktywności i personalizacji, ponieważ wcześniejsze badania wprowadziły koncepcję obecności społecznej. W niniejszym badaniu zamiary aktywnego uczestnictwa w życiu politycznym zostały zdefiniowane jako zamiar głosowania, zamiar demonstracji oraz zamiar prowadzenia kampanii na rzecz polityka. Stworzono trzy hipotezy ze zmiennymi interaktywnością i personalizacją oraz połączonym efektem obu.

Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between the social media presence of a politician and the active political participation intentions of citizens. In this study,

social media presence is measured using interactivity and personalization, as earlier research brought the concept of social presence into the field. It hadn't been tested in the context of active political participation. Three hypotheses were created following with the variables interactivity and personalization, and the combined effect of the two.

Introduction

On the 3rd of February 2019, United Kingdom Member of Parliament (MP) Ian Lucas went on BBC Radio Wales and stated that social media should be regulated when it comes to politics. The Wrexham MP stated that social media can have an enormous impact on elections, and that social media have become the most important battle ground in elections (BBC, 2019). Social media are a phenomenon that has grown a lot over the last decade. The biggest social network, Facebook, now has over 2.4 billion users¹. With just over 1 in 3 people statistically using Facebook worldwide, the effect described by MP Lucas is more than logical. In the United States alone, 49 percent of people commented on, posted about, or discussed politics on social media during the 2016 elections². As social media have become one of the most important ways of campaigning in election times, it is important that they are properly regulated. In order to set up regulation for this big influence, the effects of social media on political participation need to be further investigated.

During the last decade, research into the topic has intensified, and the picture that can be painted about the effects is becoming more and more detailed. Exploratory research has shown that the use of social media by politicians in election times has a positive effect on their electoral performance³. In addition to that, recent research has provided an outlook into a different concept that has a big effect on political participation, which is the social media presence of politicians⁴.

¹ Clement, J. (2019, August 9). Number of Facebook users worldwide 2008–2019. Retrieved October 12, 2019, from [statista.com: https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/).

² Statista Research Department. (2017, February 22). U.S. social media user online political discussion frequency 2016. Retrieved October 12, 2019, from [statista.com: https://www.statista.com/statistics/677457/social-media-us-participation-politics/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/677457/social-media-us-participation-politics/).

³ Spierings, N., & Jacobs, K. (2014). Getting personal? The impact of social media on preferential voting. *Political Behavior*, 36, 215–234. doi: 10.1007/s11109-013-9228-2.

⁴ Kruikemeier, S., van Noort, G., Vliegenthart, R., & de Vreese, C. (2016). The relationship between online campaigning and political involvement. *Online Information Review*, 40(5), 673–694. doi:10.1108/OIR-11-2015-0346.

This phenomenon describes the extent to which politicians actively use social media during elections, instead of merely having an account. Two important variables in social media presence are interactivity and personalization. When these two concepts are combined in social media, a feeling of social presence may occur⁵. Social presence is defined as a feeling as if someone you are talking with in a computer-mediated environment is really there with you. Therefore, if interactivity and personalization are combined, this feeling of social presence is thought to be stronger, and thus the effect that the computer-mediated communication has on the person is stronger. Research has been done on the effect of interactivity and personalization on citizens' political involvement and the concept of social presence has been brought into the social media context⁶; however, the political involvement studied by this research is limited to rather passive political participation, like intention to talk about politics on social media. The research gap that this study will try to address is to what extent politicians' social media presence influences citizens' active political participation. Political participation in itself is a very broad concept; for this study, active political participation is defined as the intention to vote, the intention to join a demonstration, and the intention to campaign for a politician. These three variables will be tested in the study. The research question that can be derived from this is formulated as:

RQ: What is the effect of a politician's social media presence on the public's active political participation?

Something that was remarked in previous research⁷, is that social presence plays a mediating role in the relationship. When both interactivity and personalization are combined, the social presence theory⁸ suggests that the effect may become even stronger. From this suggestion presented by the theory, the following sub research question can be formed:

SUB-RQ: Is the effect of a politician's social media presence on active political participation dependent on whether or not their social media is personalized and interactive?

⁵ Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications*. London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

⁶ Kruikemeier et al., op.cit.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B., op.cit.

In short, this study will expand upon what is currently known about the effects of a politician's social media presence on political participation by expanding upon what is currently known about political participation and looking at active participation instead of passive participation. It will contribute to society by helping map the effects of social media presence on active political participation, which will help governments to set up regulations regarding politicians and social media, in order to negate the sizeable effect social media has on elections as much as possible.

Theoretical framework

Research into the effect of social media presence of politicians on politics has been going on for over a decade now. Williams and Gulati⁹ already found that Facebook use was an indicator of electoral performance in the 2008 American presidential primaries. Since then, the amount of Facebook users has only become bigger. Multiple studies have indicated an effect of social media presence of politicians on citizens¹⁰. Social media in itself has already shown to have the ability to increase people's political participation¹¹. There has been no former distinction made in active and passive political participation in social media research. Lester Milbrath however already made the distinction between active and passive political participation in 1965. He attributed compliance actions and diffuse support to passive political participation, while voting was part of active

⁹ Williams, C. B., & Gulati, G. (2008). What is a social network worth? Facebook and vote share in the 2008 presidential primaries. *American Political Science Association* (pp. 1–17). Boston: American Political Science Association.

¹⁰ Kovic, M., Rauchfleisch, A., Metag, J., Caspar, C., & Szenogrady, J. (2017). Brute force effects of mass media presence and social media activity on electoral outcome. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 4(1), 348–371. doi:10.1080/19331681.2017.1374228; Spierings, N., & Jacobs, K. (2014). Getting personal? The impact of social media on preferential voting. *Political Behavior*, 36, 215–234. doi: 10.1007/s11109-013-9228-2; Bene, M. (2018). Post shared, vote shared: Investigating the link between Facebook performance and electoral success during the Hungarian general election campaign of 2014. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 95(2), 363–380. doi:10.1177/1077699018763309; Bright, J., Hale, S., Ganesh, B., Bulovsky, A., Margetts, H., & Howard, P. (2019). Does campaigning on social media make a difference? Evidence from candidate use of Twitter during the 2015 and 2017 U.K. elections. *Communication Research*, 1–22. doi:10.1177/0093650219872394.

¹¹ Holt, K., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J., & Ljungberg, E. (2013). Age and the effects of news media attention and social media use on political interest and participation: Do social media function as leveller? *European Journal of Communication*, 28(1), 19–34. doi:10.1177/0267323112465369

political participation¹². For the sake of this research, active political participation intentions will consist out of three variables, intention to vote, intention to demonstrate and intention to campaign for the politician. In this research, the two variables used to measure social media presence are interactivity and personalization. These were indicated by Short, Williams and Christie to be important in measuring social presence¹³. Kruikemeier and colleagues (2016) carried this effect over into social media research and found both variables to be integral in measuring social presence on social media as well¹⁴.

Interactivity

Interactivity is a concept in which two people interact with each other in computer-mediated communication. A more detailed definition of the concept is provided by Liu and Shrum; they define interactivity as “the degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, on the communication medium, and on the messages and the degree to which such influences are synchronized”¹⁵. This definition states that the asynchronous nature of media plays a part in interactivity. This is present in social media as well, as anyone can respond to anything at the time they find most convenient. Interactions work regardless of whether they are synchronous or asynchronous.

Previous research has shown that interactivity plays a role in several relationships. An example of this is the relationship of interactivity on social media with evaluations of the politician and political involvement¹⁶. These studies showed that interactivity has a positive effect on evaluation of the politician and political involvement amongst citizens. Following this, we can predict that the same effect will be present here as well, which generates the following hypothesis:

¹² Milbrath, L. (1965). *Political Participation*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

¹³ Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications*. London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

¹⁴ Kruikemeier et al., op.cit.

¹⁵ Liu-Thompkins, Y., & Shrum, L. (2002). What is interactivity and is it always such a good thing? Implications of definition, person, and situation for the influence of interactivity on advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 31(4), 53–64. doi:10.1080/00913367.2002.10673685, page 54.

¹⁶ Alvidrez, S. (2017). Interactivity in Twitter: Effects of party identity on the evaluation of political candidates and on their vote intentions. *Comunicacion y Sociedad*, 29, 103–122. doi:10.32870/cys.v0i29.6416; Lyons, B. A., & Veenstra, A. S. (2016). How (not) to talk on Twitter: effects of politicians tweets on perceptions of the Twitter environment. *Cyberpsychology, behavior and social networking*, 19(1), 8–15. doi:10.1089/cyber.2015.0319; Kruikemeier et al., op. cit.

H1: Highly interactive social media use by a politician on social media has a positive effect on a person's active political participation intentions.

Personalization

Personalization in politics is described as “an increase in individualized interactions, often at the expense of traditional political institutions”¹⁷. However, the introduction of social media changes the definition a bit. Politicians can use social media just like any other person would, so they can choose how to present their daily life. Bennett describes a framework to understand the shift that social media brought to personalization in politics: Politics have become increasingly personalized, and on social media, every politician can publicly talk about issues that affect them in their daily life¹⁸. According to Bennet, this shift has led to more active political participation by the public due to the citizens being able to identify with the politician more and develop positive associations with them¹⁹. This once again stresses the importance of this study, which will address the research gap that is present regarding active political participation. According to Louden and McCauliff, personalization on social media can lead to a feeling of authenticity of the politician that appeals to voters²⁰. By appealing to voters on a personal level, the voters will feel like they get to know the politician, and develop positive feelings towards them.

Previous research has shown that personalization on social media have positively affected variables like the public's reactions to the posts, political involvement, and the amount of votes received²¹. Following this, we can make the suggestion

¹⁷ McGregor, S. C. (2018). Personalization, social media, and voting: Effects of candidate self-personalization on vote intention. *new media & society*, 20(3), 1139–1160. doi:10.1177/1461444816686103.

¹⁸ Bennett, L. W. (2012). The personalization of politics: political identity, social media, and changing patters of participation. *The ANNALS of the American academy of political and social science*, 644(1), 20–39. doi:10.1177/0002716212451428.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Louden, A., & McCauliff, K. (2004). The ‘Authentic Candidate’: Extending candidate image assessment. In K. Hacker, *Presidential Candidate Images* (pp. 85–103). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

²¹ Lee, E.-J., & Oh, S. Y. (2012). To personalize or depersonalize? When and how politicians' personalized tweets affect the public's reactions. *Journal of Communication*, 62, 932–949. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01681.x; Kruikeimeier, S. (2014). How political candidates use Twitter and the impact on votes. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 34(1), 131–139. doi:0.1016/j.chb.2014.01.025; Kruikeimeier et al., op.cit.

that the effect that will be tested in this study will be positive as well, which generates the following hypothesis:

H2: Highly personalized social media use by a politician on social media has a positive effect on a person's active political participation intentions.

Social presence

The social presence theory describes the way in which computer-mediated communication feels like face-to-face communication²². As face-to-face communication is direct and between two people without any interruption, it can be hard to replicate in a computer-mediated environment. Short, Williams & Christie²³ describe interactivity and personalization as the two major components that can elicit this feeling of social presence. The effect of personalization and interactivity can together create a feeling of social presence, which creates an even stronger effect. Kruikemeier and colleagues were the first to research the effect of social presence in the social media context²⁴. They found that when both personal and interactive communication on Twitter was used, the effect on political involvement was bigger than when only one of the two was present. However, this effect was focused on passive political involvement, like intention to talk about politics on social media. Following the theory and previous research, the following effect can be hypothesized:

H3: The effect of a politicians' social media presence on citizens' active political participation is higher when the social media use by the politician is both highly interactive and highly personalized.

The conceptual model of the hypotheses can be found in figure 1 in appendix I.

Method

Design

In this study, I use a 2 (personalization: high versus low) by 2 (interactivity: high versus low) between-subjects post-test survey experiment. Due to the experimental nature of the study, the results will be able to say something about cause

²² Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications*. London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Kruikemeier et al., op. cit

and effect, something that other research designs cannot do. The online setting allowed for a bigger sample to be used in the groups, as people could fill in the survey whenever they wanted and weren't bound to a specific time or place. There was a total of 4 groups.

Participants

This study makes use of a convenience sample; participants were recruited using social media, by posting the link to the survey on Facebook and Instagram. All the data is recorded using the survey software Qualtrics. The data was collected between the 12th and the 29th of November. SPSS was used to carry out the analysis. The survey can be found in appendix II. In total, 122 participants were recruited. On average, the participants were 22 years old (M, SD), ranging from 18 to 52 years. 90.9% of the sample was made up out of 18–25 year olds, with only 9.1% of the participants being older than 25. 3.3% of this 9.1% were people younger than 30 but older than 25. Only 3.3% of the sample was older than 40 years old. 32.2% of the sample was male, 66.9% female, and one person identified as 'other'. The majority of the sample (62.8%) was Dutch. Italian and British nationalities each made up 4.1% of the sample. 57% of the respondents had a high school diploma, and 33% had acquired their Bachelor's or Master's diploma. The other 10% had a vocational education diploma, a primary school diploma or answered 'other'. 8 responses were deleted because they were incomplete or did not pass the manipulation check. This left the high personalization – high interactivity group with 28 respondents, the high personalization – low interactivity group with 27 respondents, the low personalization – high interactivity group with 30 respondents and the low personalization – low interactivity group with 29 respondents, resulting in a total of 114 valid responses.

Procedure

Before getting into the actual survey, the participants read the factsheet and accepted informed consent form. If the prospective participant did not agree, they were led to the end of the survey and no data were collected. If the participant did agree, they first answered some demographic questions (age, gender, nationality and highest completed level of education). After filling in these basic questions, the participants were exposed to the stimuli. The stimuli can be found in appendix III. Four mock-up Facebook profiles of politicians were created for the purpose of this study. These are all profiles of fictitious politicians, to prohibit political stance playing a confounding role in the relationship between the

variables. In each of the profiles, the participants saw one post which were either highly personalized or had very little personalization. The high personalization condition had a photo of this politician actively participating in a climate protest and asking people to join, while the low personalization condition had a photo of a call to action to join a protest, without the politician in it. Each post had four comments as well. These comments were about the post itself, with one comment asking a question and one comment giving criticism. The highly interactive condition had the politician replying to the comments, while the low interactivity condition did not have any replies by the politician. The stimuli can be found in appendix I. A timer was added to make sure the participants actually read the post, and this timer was set to 30 seconds. These 30 seconds was a sufficient time span for the participant to properly read all the text in the stimuli and look at the profile itself. After looking at the stimuli, the participant was faced with a manipulation check. They were asked whether to what extent they thought the content was personalized and interactive. After having done the manipulation check, the participant was asked about their intention to vote for the politician, their intention to join a climate demonstration, and their intention to campaign for the politician. All these intentions were once again measured on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 stands for 'not at all', and 7 represents 'definitely'.

Results

Before being able to test the hypotheses, the data had to be made ready for analysis. One survey question was included to test whether the participant was paying attention. The politician displayed in the manipulation was not actually a politician, so the question was whether the participant was familiar with the politician. This was tested on a scale from 1 (not at all familiar) to 7 (very familiar). Responses that answered anywhere from 4 up to this question were excluded from analyses. Responses with 2 or 3 as answer were not excluded, as people could have had some familiarity because they had seen the picture before on the internet, or they might have mis-clicked. After declaring the relevant responses as missing, 114 valid responses remained. In order to move on with analysis, a new variable was created that could indicate which manipulation condition was used. The conditions included here were high personalization and high interactivity, high personalization and low interactivity, low personalization and high interactivity and low personalization and low interactivity.

A one-way analysis of variance was ran to test whether there were differences between the manipulation groups (randomization check). The variables used for this were age, gender, and level of education. The randomization turned out to be successful, as all groups reported a non-significant difference between the different conditions. The full results for this test can be found in table 1 in appendix IV. As seen in the table, all differences are the same and non-significant ($p = 1.00$).

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to check whether the manipulation turned out to be successful. This analysis of variance was ran with the variables that indicated in what the participants thought the post was (interactivity and personalization), and the variable that indicate what the post was actually meant to be (manipulation).

Post hoc comparisons (Bonferroni corrected) indicated a significant difference in the personalization level between the high personalization and high interactivity condition ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.44$) and the low personalization and low interactivity condition ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.49$) with a mean difference of 1.86 ($SE = .39$, $p < .001$). This was also the case between the high personalisation and low interactivity condition ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.16$) and the low personalisation and low interactivity condition ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.49$) with a mean difference of 1.79 ($SE = .38$, $p < .01$).

In contrast, there was no significant difference in the personalization level between the high personalization and high interactivity condition ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.44$) and the low personalization and high interactivity condition ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.61$) with a mean difference of 0.81 ($SE = .36$, $p = .16$), as well as between the high personalization and low interactivity condition ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.16$) and the low personalization and high interactivity condition ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.61$) with a mean difference of 0.74 ($SE = .36$, $p = .26$).

Post hoc comparisons (Bonferroni corrected) indicated a significant difference in the interactivity level between the high personalization and high interactivity condition ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.50$) and the high personalization and low interactivity condition ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.82$) with a mean difference of 2.21 ($SE = .38$, $p < .01$), as well as between the high personalization and high interactivity condition ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.50$) and the low personalization and low interactivity condition ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.49$) with a mean difference of 3.62 ($SE = .37$, $p < .01$). This significant difference was also apparent between the low personalization and high interactivity condition ($M = 6.06$, $SD = 1.01$) and the high personalization and low interactivity condition ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.82$) with a mean difference of 2.37 ($SE = .370$, $p < .01$). The significant difference was also found between the

low personalization and high interactivity condition ($M = 6.06$, $SD = 1.01$) and the low personalization and low interactivity condition ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.49$) with a mean difference of 3.78 ($SE = .37$, $p < .01$).

After running the manipulation check, a new scale variable was created that measured active political participation. This new variable was computed by taking the variables that measure vote intention, intention to demonstrate, and intention to campaign. A mean scale was created to measure active political participation. In order to test whether this variable was reliable enough, a reliability analysis was conducted. The reliability of the scale was good, Cronbach's alpha = .80. The Cronbach's alpha could not be improved by deleting any items. The new variable ranged had a range between 1 and 7, with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.42$). Another new variable was created to distinguish between the high and low interactivity conditions and high and low personalization conditions. In order to create this variable, the manipulation variable was recoded into two new variables for the personalization condition and the interactivity condition. This variable was created in order to test the hypotheses separately.

After having run all the checks and constructing new variables, the final analysis could be ran. A two-way analysis of variance was conducted to test the effects of interactivity and personalization on the active political participation, as well as the interaction effect of those two variables.

There was a difference in number of cases between the subgroups, but this was not bigger than 10 percent, which means the assumptions for running a two-way analysis of variance were met and analysis could be carried out as normal.

The two-way analysis of variance showed a non-significant, weak effect of interactivity on active political participation, $F(1,110) = 3.21$, $p = .08$, $n^2 = .17$. This result does not reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of interactivity on active political participation, which leads us to reject H1.

The analysis also uncovered a non-significant, weak effect of personalization on active political participation, $F(1,110) = 1.01$, $p = .32$, $n^2 = .10$. This also leads us to fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant effect of personalization on active political participation, and thus reject H2.

Level of personalization explained 10% of the variance in active political participation, while level of interactivity explained 17% of the variance in active political participation.

The analysis also revealed a significant, weak interaction effect between personalization and interactivity, $F(1,110) = 11.57$, $p = .01$, $n^2 = .24$. The effect of

personalization is different for social media posts when there are different levels of interactivity present. With this, we find support for H3, and can thus reject the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the effect of social media presence on active political participation when interactivity and personalization are combined.

Furthermore, a conceptual model has been created to showcase the effects mentioned. This can be found in figure 2 in Appendix IV.

Conclusion and discussion

This study was conducted in order to find the effect of social media presence on active political participation. Social media presence was divided into two variables, personalization and interactivity. The study also aimed to find the effect of perceived social presence, which is a combination of the two variables together, on active political participation. Active political participation in itself was divided into three variables, intention to vote, intention to demonstrate, and intention to vote for the politician. The first hypothesis predicted that highly interactive social media use by a politician on social media would have a positive effect on a person's active political participation intentions. The effect reported in the two-way analysis of variance was found to be positive, but it turned out to be a non-significant effect. This led to rejecting the first hypothesis. This is not in line with earlier research, as other researchers found significant positive effects for interactivity on political participation²⁵. The second hypothesis anticipated that highly personalized social media use by a politician on social media would have a positive effect on a person's active political participation intentions. The relationship between the two variables was found to be positive, but the non-significant results lead to the second hypothesis to be rejected as well. This is not what previous research predicted, as they had all found significant positive effects for personalization on political participation²⁶. The third and last hypothesis hypothesized that the effect of a politicians' social media presence on citizens'

²⁵ Alvidrez, S. (2017). Interactivity in Twitter: Effects of party identity on the evaluation of political candidates and on their vote intentions. *Comunicacion y Sociedad*, 29, 103–122. doi:10.32870/cys.v0i29.6416; Kruikemeier et al., op. cit.

²⁶ Kruikemeier, op. cit.; Lee, E.-J., & Oh, S. Y. (2012). To personalize or depersonalize? When and how politicians' personalized tweets affect the public's reactions. *Journal of Communication*, 62, 932–949. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01681.x

active political participation is higher when the social media use by the politicians is both highly interactive and highly personalized. The two-way analysis of variance conducted found a significant, weak positive interaction effect between interactivity and personalization. This means that the effect of interactivity on active political participation intentions is stronger when personalization is high, as well as the effect of personalization being stronger when interactivity is high. This is in line with what Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart & De Vreese found in their research on social presence²⁷. Short, Williams & Christie's social presence theory seems to be fully translatable into social media as well²⁸. This opens up interesting pathways into applying this theory into more avenues of social media research in political contexts.

As with every study, this research has some limitations. There were some problems with the representativeness of the sample. The sample used in this research had a very skewed age distribution. 90.9% of the participants in this study were between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. This shows that the younger generation was overrepresented in this sample, while the older generation was underrepresented. The results might thus be biased towards the younger generation and thus not be a sufficient representation of the whole population. The generation between 18 and 25 years old are the generation that uses social media the most, which may lead to a different susceptibility to influences from politicians' social media behavior than the older generation that doesn't use social media as frequently and hasn't grown up with it. As with the age distribution, the distribution between male participants and female participants was also not equal. 32.2% of the sample population identified as male, while 66.9% of the sample population identified as female. This is not an accurate representation of the world population, as the ratio is 50% male and 50% female in the world population. The education level was also not representative of the world population. The majority of the sample population had achieved a high school diploma as their highest achieved diploma. The bias within the sample described here has impacted the validity of the study's results. There were also some potential problems with the stimuli. Four people failed the manipulation check question that was posed. They were asked whether they knew the politician in the picture. As the picture used in the post is one of a copyright-free images website, it is possible that those

²⁷ Kruikemeier et al., *op. cit.*

²⁸ Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications*. London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd

four people had already seen that picture and thus recognized him. There was another possible limitation with the stimuli. Due to the size of the image, it was easily readable when filling in the survey on the desktop. However, the stimuli were hard to read when they were presented on the screen of a mobile phone. Dependent on the size of the mobile phone, they might have not been readable at all. This might explain why four participants didn't fill in the survey completely and stopped halfway through. The topic chosen for the stimuli might have played a confounding role in the relationship between the variables as well. As the topic of climate change is viewed at differently on different ends of the political spectrum, the stance of the participant towards the topic might influence their intentions. The topic of climate change is generally associated with left-wing politicians, so if someone doesn't believe in climate change and/or is rather right-wing, they would never demonstrate for climate change, vote for a politician that does believe in climate change and neither campaign for that politician. The independent variables play little to no role in their behavioral intentions, no matter what stimuli they are faced with. Another limitation of the study is the sample size. Due to the limited amount of time and resources available, only 122 participants could be recruited. The low sample size may also be an indicator of why some results are insignificant, as they aren't massively insignificant. If this study was carried out on a larger scale, the results might well be significant and further advance the field of political communication research.

In future research, it could be interesting to apply the theory of social presence in other contexts of social media and politics. Now this study has also found support for this theory being applicable in a social media setting, even in a different political context, I would suggest delving further into what this strengthened effect of interactivity and personalization together can further do in politics. Future research should try to work with stimuli that address a different topic than climate change. As this topic can be controversial, the researchers should try to find a topic that is rather difficult to have an opinion on. That might be difficult to find, as people tend to have the tendency to complain, but a more neutral topic than climate change would be advisable. In the event of climate change being used, it would be an idea to control for existing attitudes of the participants towards climate change. Future research should also focus on the distinction between active and passive political participation in a social media context, as this has not been done before.

In spite of the mentioned limitations, this study does offer an interesting insight into a relatively new field of research. The distinction between active and

passive political participation had not been explored before, but active political participation as a concept does seem to be influenced by social presence as well. Following this study, I would advise politicians to have their social media content be as interactive and personalized as possible, as it could pay off for them in the next elections!

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