

The intersection of Attention Economy and Populist Politics: Communication Tactics of Populist vs. Mainstream Parties on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how politicians from mainstream and populist parties adapt their communication strategies to the new informational environment, where attention is a scarce and valuable resource. It specifically examines whether populist parties employ attention-grabbing strategies more frequently than their mainstream counterparts. Set against the broader context of digital communication, this analysis focuses on the 2017 Austrian national elections. Utilizing the AUTNES 2017 dataset, the research employs content analysis of 2,769 posts from six political parties, with a detailed comparison of posts from the populist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the mainstream Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). The study assesses the prevalence of visual elements, exclamation marks, and attention-grabbing tools in textual content within the 6-week pre-election period.

The findings partly support my central hypothesis that populists use more attention-grabbing strategies than mainstream parties. Specifically, the FPÖ employs attention-grabbing tools more frequently in their textual content compared to the ÖVP, especially with a significantly higher use of exclamation marks. Contrary to expectations, however, the study does not confirm a higher use of visual communication among populists, as both parties exhibit similar levels of visual communication usage.

This thesis enhances our understanding of how political groups utilize digital platforms, showing the tactics different parties use to capture and control attention online. It underscores how both populist and mainstream parties adapt their communication to the new informational environment, impacting how voters perceive and interact with them in a world full of information but short on attention.

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1. Introduction

“We reject these dirty campaigning methods. October 15 is our chance for real change in this country!” (Kurz 2017 d).

“This whole dirt bucket story surrounding the current SPÖ/ÖVP government is just last class and indicative! The red-black dirty campaigning and bribery swamp should be drained. The reckoning will take place on October 15 - FPÖ!” (Strache 2017 a).

In late September 2017, just before the elections, a scandal erupted in Austria involving the SPÖ's smear campaign against Sebastian Kurz of the ÖVP, using fake Facebook pages to discredit him (Guerrero 2018). Although these methods targeted mainstream party leader Kurz, he responded with a balanced and measured post, while populist party leader Strache employed strong, emotional language to grab attention. This contrast highlights the differing communication styles of mainstream and populist politicians. This thesis will explore these differences by specifically examining the frequency of attention-grabbing strategies used on social media by both groups.

We routinely browse platforms like Facebook and Twitter every day, encountering a vast array of information and certain content manages to capture our attention more effectively than others. Influencers, companies, and even politicians vie for our attention. In the constantly changing information landscape, individuals, including politicians, strive to adapt to the new environment by changing their communication styles. Unlike previous eras where information itself was scarce, today we face information overload, with attention emerging as the primary scarce resource in high demand. This phenomenon is termed as the 'Attention Economy,' (Davenport and Beck 2001; Goldhaber 1997). Technological progress has amplified this phenomenon, granting information producers unprecedented access to audience preferences

and worsening the scarcity of attention (Vettehen and Schaap 2023). Within this context, attention-based politics has become prevalent, with politicians utilizing communication strategies to capture the attention of a broad audience, often prioritizing this over policy discussions (Hendricks and Vestergaard 2019).

Why did Donald Trump's tweets get more attention from users? (Merkovity 2017). Does the attention economy have something to do with it? Donald Trump's posts serve as a prime example of attention-grabbing efforts. Deliberately adopting a provocative and meme-worthy persona, he sought to maximize attention and engagement, effectively leveraging the principles of the attention economy (Merkovity 2017). He serves as a prominent illustration of a modern politician who utilizes attention-grabbing strategies in communication.



(Trump, 2017)

He uses slogans, catchy phrases, controversial statements, and emotional, mostly negative posts on social media to win votes. For instance, his hashtag #MakeAmericaGreatAgain is a clear example of a catchy slogan.

Attention-grabbing strategies are used worldwide by politicians for different reasons. However, while many modern politicians adjust their communication to fit the social media structure, not all adopt attention-grabbing tactics with the same frequency. Some, mainly the leaders of mainstream parties, maintain a comparatively more reserved approach, as evidenced by the

example of Kurz's post in the beginning (Bracciale and Martella 2017; Lin, d'Haenens, and Liao 2023).

Social media has reshaped political communication by allowing politicians to directly engage with the public, sidestepping traditional media gatekeepers. In this crowded digital arena, politicians compete for attention not only with each other but also with other users. This competition has fueled a shift towards more personalized and sensationalized politics, where entertainment and emotional appeals are key to capturing public interest. Politicians increasingly adopt attention-grabbing strategies like catchy phrases, simplified language, and emotionally charged posts to attract votes (Magin et al. 2024). This situation raises concerns such as the oversimplification of politics, the neglect of important policies, and the potential manipulation of uninformed voters through disinformation. (Vaidhyanathan, 2018).

At the same time, many scholars have noted the success of populists on social media, where they effectively use platforms like Twitter and Facebook as crucial communication tools (Maurer 2022; Engesser, Fawzi, and Larsson 2017; Carral, Tuñón, and Elías 2023)

Figures like Geert Wilders and H.C. Strache leverage social media to bypass traditional media and directly connect with the public. This approach enables the rapid spread of populist messages, aligning closely with the dynamics of social media. (Schmuck and Hameleers 2020; Magin et al. 2024) .

And thus, our puzzle emerges. In the realm of social media, where attention is currency, populist parties seem to thrive. Does this suggest they utilize attention-grabbing tactics more than non-populist parties? This is the question that this paper aims to answer. This research is significant as it links two major contemporary phenomena amplified by social media: populism and the attention economy. Given the recent rise in populism (Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart 2019), it is crucial to understand whether populists use attention-grabbing methods

more frequently to grasp their communication style and its effect on their success. In a world full of information, the way politicians grab attention can significantly affect public opinion and election results. Knowing these strategies helps other political groups to adapt or counter them, improving political communication. Additionally, as digital media changes politics, understanding attention-grabbing methods is key to helping voters think critically about the messages they see.

There is a notable scarcity of approaches to populism that focus on the relationship between politics and digital media. While some studies, such as Maly (2020) on algorithmic populism and Carral et al. (2023) on how politicians, concretely populists adapt to social media structures, begin to address this area. There is a limited exploration of the connection between the attention economy and populism. Some studies touch upon the communication strategies of mainstream and populist politicians (Lin, d’Haenens, and Liao 2023; Ernst et al. 2019) and the populist communication style (Magin et al., 2024) on social media. However, there is a distinct lack of research on how attention-grabbing strategies specifically relate to populism.

This thesis aims to explore how populist politicians strategically use social media through the lens of attention economics. The hypothesis to be tested is: Populist parties and their leaders use attention-grabbing strategies on social media platforms more frequently than mainstream parties and their leaders.

I begin with a literature review, highlighting existing gaps and defining the core concepts. This foundation leads to my theoretical framework, where I outline the expectation that populists utilize more attention-grabbing strategies. I then define what constitutes attention-grabbing tools, drawing from the literature to explain the criteria used to categorize the posts. This transitions into the methodology and findings sections, where I discuss how my central hypothesis has been partially proven. Finally, I explore the implications of my findings and suggest directions for future research.

I examined 2,769 posts from six political parties, sourced from the AUTNES 2017 dataset, to quantify the use of visuals and exclamation marks. Special attention is directed towards two specific parties: the populist FPÖ and the mainstream ÖVP, the core analysis involves a detailed evaluation of 999 posts from these parties, assessing attention-grabbing content as opposed to policy-oriented and moderate content within the 6 weeks before the 2017 election.

1 Literature review

1.1 Social Media and Politics

Politicians adapt to the changing information environment, with a notable shift towards direct communication via social media platforms, bypassing journalistic filters (Guerrero 2018). They heavily rely on social networking sites since the structure of social media allows them to directly engage with the audience, target their messages, present their “Authentic” voice, discuss politics in real-time, and monitor the progress of other campaigns (Ernst et al. 2019; Lilleker and Balaban 2021). For example, Facebook's broad reach allows for tailoring messages to specific interest groups and collecting supporter data to target similar audiences through ads. Steinveg and Bjørnå (2023) discuss how these platforms are used by politicians for agenda-setting to define problems and promote ideas. Their findings suggest that politicians take advantage of social media to define problems and sell their ideas while setting agendas. Their research also indicates that politicians utilize social media to circumvent traditional media for political communication. Scholarly works also delve into how the style of politicians has evolved in the wake of social media's emergence. They observe that parties change their communication strategies to suit online communication platforms: They personalize their

messages or humanize them through personal anecdotes (Lin, d’Haenens, and Liao 2023; Zamir 2024).

1.2 Communication strategies of mainstream and populist politicians

To answer the question about whether populist politicians use attention-grabbing tools more often on social media, there is a need to grasp the communication strategies commonly employed by both populist and mainstream politicians, how these strategies have evolved with the rise of social networking sites (SNS) and the distinctions or similarities between them.

The paper by Lin et al. (2023) observes how mainstream parties adapt their communication strategies to fit online platforms. They mention that the success of fringe parties in elections is often tied to their use of populist language (Lin, d’Haenens, and Liao 2023; p. 601). These parties employ radical rhetoric to criticize political elites. However, mainstream parties, according to rational-choice theory, tend to avoid adopting such radical rhetoric to appeal to the median voters and maintain their reputation (Downs 1957). Moreover, recent research on party communication patterns has shown that mainstream parties tend to favor more moderate, balanced, and positive communication styles across various social networking platforms (Bracciale and Martella 2017). Alessandro Nai (2021) describes populists as atypical political figures who differ from mainstream politicians, who generally use a "low" style of politics (Ostiguy 2009). Nai (2021) states that populists prioritize stirring emotions, making dramatic gestures, launching attacks against the "ruling class" (Macmillan 2017) exaggerating, provoking, and breaking political and social norms intentionally (Heinisch 2003).

Lin et al. (2023) focus on Taiwan's 2020 national election, they analyze Facebook posts from parliamentary parties (total N = 3,315). The study’s Findings reveal that mainstream parties generally adopt more moderate populist approaches on Facebook, which include using less

extreme language and more policy-focused content. While the use of stylistic devices like emotional appeals, and sensationalism correlates positively with populist communication, mainstream parties tend to present populist frameworks negatively. Although online user engagement is partly associated with populist communication, higher engagement levels do not necessarily lead to increased use of populist frameworks by mainstream parties on Facebook. This observation might suggest that mainstream parties avoid using provocative and emotional communication styles because they are not typically associated with such tactics. Since their voter base does not expect these kinds of communications, mainstream parties may steer clear of them to avoid alienating their supporters.

On the other hand, populist parties are already associated with provocative and emotional communication styles (Ostiguy 2009; Macmillan 2017; Heinisch 2003). This established perception allows them to capitalize on the attention-driven environment of social media more effectively.

1.3 Populist communication style

Before moving forward, it is essential to define the populist communication style, often discussed in recent literature when talking about politicians' communication strategies. Populist communication style focuses on engaging followers through simplified language, emotive appeals, and a direct, confrontational tone, framed around a "people vs. elite" narrative to mobilize support and champion populist agendas. While it shares similarities with general attention-grabbing strategies, it has to be noted that attention-grabbing strategies are broader and do not specifically focus on the "people vs. elite" theme.

Although the use of populist communication style is mainly correlated with populists, mainstream parties also employ populist communication styles. For example, Magin and others (2024) explored how and to what extent platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) and party characteristics (populist vs. non-populist parties) affected the use of populist communication by Norwegian political parties on social media during the 2021 national election campaign. They found that the frequency of populist communication varied across different platforms and it was not consistently the populist Progress Party that engaged in it the most. Parties positioned on the edges of the political spectrum tended to employ more populist rhetoric. Left-leaning parties commonly exhibited anti-elitism, while the right-wing Progress Party was notable for its exclusion of out-groups.

Since both populist and non-populist parties utilize populist communication styles, and given it is a significant component of attention-based politics, it is unclear if attention-grabbing strategies are exclusive to populists. This gap in the literature warrants investigation to determine if all politicians employ attention-grabbing strategies similarly or if there is a distinction between populist and non-populist parties.

Many studies have investigated whether members of populist parties communicate in a more populist style. Research from individual countries (Bernhard 2017; Bobba and McDonnell 2016) and cross-country comparisons (Bracciale and Martella 2017) have found evidence supporting this idea. They concluded that populist politicians use more populist communication style than non-populist politicians.

Ernst et al. (2019) analyzed statements from 103 politicians across six countries, studying content and style in various communication channels like social media, news media, and talk shows. They considered factors like party affiliation (populist vs nonpopulist) and hierarchical

position (backbencher vs frontbencher). Their findings suggest that members of populist parties tend to use a mix of populist-related messages and stylistic elements more frequently than mainstream party members. Populist communication is especially common among backbenchers when addressing issues on social media or in newspapers. They stress the importance of both content and style, defining content as focusing on people-centrism, anti-elitism, and restoring popular sovereignty (Wettstein et al. 2016) and style as negativity mainly to criticize the current system and opponents, emotional language to connect deeply with people's feelings, and sociable language to build a sense of community.

Additionally, Ernst et al. (2019) noted that politicians with lower status, like backbenchers, often rely on "populist news values" to get media attention, especially on social media where they can directly engage with the public. It is evident that the communication style is influenced not just by whether a party is populist or not but also by other characteristics like being a backbencher, though this study does not focus on that.

As populist movements gain popularity among voters, Alessandro Nai (2021), stresses the need to understand their communication style. His extensive study provides systematic evidence by comparing the communication styles of populist and non-populist candidates worldwide. Nai's (2021) findings reveal that populist campaigns worldwide are 15% more negative, feature 11% more character attacks, and include 8% more fear messages than campaigns of non-populist candidates.

Furthermore, Schmuck and Hameleers (2020), conducted a comparative content analysis that explored stylistic and contextual factors that resonate with populist communication on social networking sites. The researchers examined how politicians in Austria and the Netherlands used social media before and after the 2017 elections. They analyzed 1010 Facebook posts and tweets from the leading candidates. Their findings indicate that populist communication is

more prevalent in both right and left-wing populist parties. Moreover, they observed that, in general, all parties tend to employ populist communication more frequently before elections compared to after elections. Even though this study analyzed the same elections that I am analyzing, it mainly focused on populist communication, exploring negative and positive emotions and the "us vs. them" rhetoric. In contrast, this thesis examines attention-grabbing tools such as emotionality, exclamation marks, use of visuals, and provocative messages which the paper by Schmuck and Hameleers (2020) did not do. My thesis goes beyond populist communication to incorporate attention-based politics.

One of the attention-grabbing tools is visual communication. Images and videos, capable of evoking emotions and showing authenticity, have become essential for engaging with supporters and voters. Many have shifted from text to visuals for this reason (Russmann 2022). Farkas and others (2022) conducted a comparative analysis of visual political communication on Facebook across 28 countries. They highlight the potency of images in evoking emotions and shaping political attitudes, suggesting a natural alignment with populist messaging (Kriesi 2014). However, contrary to expectations, their study found that images are not the primary mode of communication for populists. They suggest that visually, populist parties resemble non-populists more than the other way around. Consequently, it cannot be stated certainly that populists will use more attention-grabbing tools such as visual communication than mainstream politicians.

1.4 The success of populist parties on social media

Populists have emerged as particularly adept users of social media. Social networks have enabled populists to garner more votes and translate retweets into electoral success (Engesser, Fawzi, and Larsson 2017; Maurer 2022). This underscores the significance of social media platforms for populist parties. Carral and others (2023) qualitatively analyzed tweets to delve into the communication strategy of La Pen on Twitter, and how the party “Rassemblement National” shifted its fascist image towards that of a protector of national sovereignty and interests. This research demonstrated that RN, representing European populism, effectively adjusted its communication strategies to leverage social networks, enhancing its Twitter campaign performance from the 2014 to the 2019 European Parliament elections. The findings underscore the party's skillful use of social media, highlighting populists' adeptness in adapting to digital platforms.

Moreover, Populist politicians were among the early adopters of social networking sites (Schmuck and Hameleers 2020). One reason for their early and successful adoption of social media is the common disregard they face from national mainstream media. (Bos, Brug, and Vreese 2010). Trump posted: “If the press covered me accurately, I would have far less reason to 'tweet.' Sadly, I don’t know if that will ever happen!” (Trump, 5 December 2016). It is evident that for some politicians, traditional media are seen as inaccurate and unreliable, so they prefer to communicate directly with citizens, spreading messages in an unfiltered way. (Schmuck and Hameleers 2020; Farkas et al. 2022)

To overcome this media resistance, populist politicians must draw and maximize attention, leveraging social media techniques honed during political activism (Bos, Brug, and Vreese 2010)

Maly (2020) offers important insights into how metrics like reach, followers, likes, and attention contribute to the construction and expansion of populist networks in the attention-driven hybrid media system. It underscores that populism is not solely shaped by the communicative relationship between journalists and politicians but extends to citizens, activists, and computational agencies. The paper argues that contemporary populism goes beyond being a mere frame or style; it involves data mining and gamification through advanced engagement platforms. Furthermore, it asserts that digital media not only serves as a platform for populist expression but also plays a pivotal role in formatting and circulating the populist voice across various platforms, eventually influencing legacy media. Maly (2020) explores the link between digital media and populism but does not address attention-grabbing strategies or differences in communication styles between mainstream and populist parties.

1.5 Attention Economy and Politics

While research often examines the relationship between social media, politics, and the rise of populism, the specific impact of the attention economy on political communication is less explored. The attention economy, a central component of the internet, significantly shapes political communication strategies. Magin et al., (2024) highlight how direct communication, attention economy, and user metrics provide strategic advantages for using populist communication on social media. Therefore, a clear grasp of what constitutes the attention economy is important for further exploration. Herbert Simon, a Nobel Laureate in economics, pointed out in 1971:” In an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information

consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients (Hendricks and Vestergaard 2019b).

Today, even though we have free access to lots of information, it still costs us our attention. In politics, the attention economy underscores the importance of crafting compelling messages and narratives to engage voters amidst a flood of competing information. For instance, simple, bold, catchy messages like "Make America Great Again" (Trump, 2016), and "Austrians deserve fairness!" (Strache, 2017) are attention-grabbers. Since capturing the attention is vital for politicians too, they try to exploit it to their advantage.

Attention-based politics is heavily influenced by the dynamics of the attention economy, where capturing and retaining attention is crucial. Merkovity (2017) defines attention-based politics as "the process in which politicians use their communication to draw the attention of the biggest possible crowd of the audience (voters) to themselves or to the themes they propose in the multitude of information or news flows". Merkovity (2017) extensively discusses attention-based politics, using Donald Trump's 2016 campaign as an example of political communication filled with attention-grabbing efforts. The author discusses how Trump's strategy relied heavily on attention-grabbing attributes in his communication, often overshadowing the actual message.

Merkovity (2017) examines the essential elements of attention-based politics utilized in Trump's campaign, such as network logic, self-mediatization, popular politics, and populist political communication. I plan to explore and define these components in greater detail within the theory section of my thesis.

While Merkovity (2017) provides a foundational introduction to attention-based politics and highlights the importance of attention in political communication, focusing particularly on Donald Trump, it does not conduct a comparative analysis between populist and mainstream

politicians. In contrast, my thesis addresses this gap by explicitly comparing the frequency and methods of attention-grabbing tactics used by populist versus mainstream politicians on social media, thus providing a deeper understanding of the strategic differences and similarities in their communication approaches.

1.5.1 Austria

Since my thesis utilizes data from the 2017 Austrian elections, I will briefly discuss a study conducted by Russmann (2022). This research provides a comparative analysis of the social media strategies employed by Austrian political parties during the national elections of 2013, 2017, and 2019. Study includes semi-structured interviews with heads of digital communication from all parliamentary parties after each election.

Russman's (2022) findings highlight a significant shift from text-based to visual communication on social media among Austrian parties, recognizing the potential of visuals to convey authenticity and evoke emotions. Study also reveals that efforts to humanize politicians — showing them in casual settings to foster a personal connection — were initially limited to minor parties such as NEOS, FPÖ, and the Greens. However, by 2017, this strategy had been broadly adopted, with top candidates being actively followed by photographers to capture engaging campaign moments. This approach significantly heightened user engagement and personalization in political messaging, key strategies especially noted within the populist Freedom Party (FPÖ) (Russmann 2022).

Although Russmann's (2022) study offers valuable insights into Austrian political parties' adoption of social media strategies, it lacks a systematic comparison between populist and mainstream parties.

It is evident that while many studies explore the communication strategies of populist and non-populist parties and the broader dynamics of the attention economy, there remains a critical gap. Most discussions do not clearly connect attention-based politics, arising from the attention economy, with populist politicians. Merkovity's (2017) analysis of Donald Trump's campaign strategies illustrates the use of attention-based politics. Yet, this approach differs from the direct comparison of populist and mainstream parties employed in this paper to demonstrate a clear link.

There is a significant research gap: the comparative analysis of the use of attention-grabbing strategies between mainstream and populist politicians is underexplored. Understanding these strategies is crucial because they often prioritize emotional engagement over factual representation, influencing voter behavior and potentially deepening political divides by focusing on contentious issues. In a world where attention is a scarce resource, the methods politicians use to capture it can profoundly impact public opinion and election outcomes.

Furthermore, the role of the attention economy in shaping modern political communication is under-discussed. In Austria, for instance, the populist right commands about 30% national support, often exceeding that of the main parties (Schmuck 2016). This statistic highlights the need for a detailed study of populist communication strategies. As digital media reshapes politics, understanding these strategies is crucial for voters to critically assess messages and for political entities to respond effectively, thus improving political discourse.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Definition of key terms and concepts

To explore the rationale behind my primary hypothesis—that populist parties and their leaders employ more attention-grabbing strategies than mainstream parties and their leaders—this chapter will present supporting findings, explain key concepts, and examine the reasons for populists' heightened use of these strategies. Additionally, I will define the attention-grabbing tools essential for shaping my methodology.

The influence of social media on political communication is significant, enabling politicians to engage directly with the public and bypass traditional media gatekeepers (Sandberg, Jacobs, and Spierings 2022). This accessibility encourages politicians to highlight their "authentic" voices and adapt their messaging for digital audiences (Russmann 2022). While both mainstream and populist politicians use varied strategies to capture attention on social networks, their approaches often differ significantly (Ernst et al. 2019)

Mainstream politicians often steer clear of radical rhetoric to appeal to the median voters (Downs 1957), typically opting for more balanced and positive communication styles (Bracciale & Martella 2017; Lin et al., 2020). In contrast, populist politicians are likely to adopt more emotional and confrontational tones. Populists often use a "people vs. elite" narrative, which naturally leads to more dramatic and attention-grabbing rhetoric. This style aims to mobilize supporters by focusing on emotional and sensational issues that highlight the divide between ordinary people and the elite (Nai 2021).

This suggests that populists might depend more on these tactics than mainstream parties, supporting the idea that they use more attention-grabbing tools. While such methods can make content go viral on social media, mainstream parties usually stick to a more measured approach. (Ostiguy 2009). They often avoid overly bold, radical, or less serious messages to keep their reputation intact and meet what their supporters expect from them. Even when mainstream parties try to shift towards more populist right policies, it leads to losing votes (Krause, Cohen, and Abou-Chadi 2023) demonstrating that they might prefer to keep a moderate image.

Mainstream politicians often prioritize policy discussions and positive messaging, avoiding overly provocative or sensational language that could undermine their reliability and integrity (Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Lin et al., 2020). In contrast, as Nai (2021) notes populists typically focus on evoking strong emotions, employing dramatic gestures, and attacking the "ruling class" with what can be described as "carnavalesque" methods (MacMillan 2017), which include exaggeration, provocation, and intentional disruption of political and social norms (Heinisch, 2003). For instance, the Austrian Freedom Party is known for intentionally generating scandals to capture media attention (Schmuck and Matthes 2017), and Donald Trump's campaign style is marked by its overtly aggressive language. For these parties, using dramatic and emotionally charged language aligns with their image (Heinisch 2003) and does not damage their reputation as much as it would for mainstream parties. Indicating that they might be more inclined to use attention-grabbing strategies.

Populist parties might leverage these attention-grabbing tactics despite potential risks to their reputation because the benefits—such as immediate visibility and rapid voter mobilization—may outweigh the drawbacks. They use these tactics to resonate with the frustrations of disenchanted voters, helping their messages spread quickly and go viral. This dramatic way of

communicating fits with their position against the elite, helps them get noticed quickly, and sometimes leads to success in elections.

I have to note that both mainstream and populist politicians utilize a populist communication style characterized by emotive appeals, and a "people vs. elite" narrative (Magin et al. 2024). Although this style shares some characteristics with attention-grabbing techniques—like emotionality and sensationalism—it is distinct from more general attention-grabbing strategies that emphasize presentation style through elements like capitalization and distinctive visuals (Merkovity 2017; Bracciale and Martella 2017; Hameleers et al. 2021). Research indicates that populists employ a populist communication style more frequently (Bobba and McDonnell 2016; Bracciale and Martella 2017; Bernhard 2017; Ernst et al. 2019)

For example, Schmuck and Hameleers (2020) found that the FPÖ's top candidate's percentage of populist communication in posts was 38.3%, while the ÖVP's leader's was 8.7%. Since this style has many similarities with attention-grabbing strategies such as emotionality, simplifying language, and sensationalism (Sandberg, Jacobs, and Spierings 2022; Ernst et al. 2019) this might indicate that populist parties use more attention-grabbing methods.

My main hypothesis is also supported by the fact that populists are particularly successful on SNS. Their success can be explained by their adept use of attention-grabbing strategies that align well with the dynamics of these platforms.

For instance, Ceccobelli et al.(2020) found that populist actors from 18 Western democracies received more likes and shares than non-populist actors. Similarly, Sandberg et al.(2022) noted that populist members of parliament from Austria, the Netherlands, and Sweden received more reactions compared to mainstream politicians. Populists' high levels of engagement indicate that they effectively capture and keep the audience's interest. This perceived success on social media might suggest that they are using attention-grabbing tactics more frequently.

Furthermore, populist politicians have increasingly turned to social media as a crucial platform, especially as mainstream media often overlooks them. (Bos, Brug, and Vreese 2010) As Russmann (2022) mentions populists like the right-wing FPÖ have used social media to compensate for limited traditional media coverage. Their early adoption of social media platforms suggests they have become adept at leveraging these tools to bypass traditional media and directly engage with the public by bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and directly connecting with the public, all politicians effectively disseminate their messages, capitalizing on the attention economy where sensational and controversial content thrives (Merkovity 2017)

2.2 Defining attention-grabbing tools

In politics, the attention economy, an economic system where attention is a scarce resource (Davenport and Beck 2001), is critical as it shapes communication strategies, emphasizing the need for compelling messages to capture voter attention in a crowded media landscape. This leads to the prioritization of sensational and controversial content to attract views and clicks, as seen in simple, bold slogans like “No to Russian Law” (Recent protests in Georgia, Aljazeera 2024,) #MakeAmericaGreatAgain, #nowornever (Kurz, 2017) are attention-grabbers. With a deluge of information bombarding people daily, politicians compete not only with each other but also with other users and influencers.

Merkovity (2017) explores attention-based politics within the attention economy, emphasizing the importance of capturing and retaining attention. Merkovity (2017) highlights how Donald Trump's 2016 campaign utilized attention-grabbing techniques. Trump's strategies involved skillfully directing audience focus to enhance his political impact. Trump stood out not only for his provocative statements but also for his distinctive use of punctuation marks. For example: “NOOOO! @CNN is so unfair to me!! They called Lyin’Ted the winner!

DISASTER! Expect a lawsuit, @CNN! #WIPrimary” (Trump, 2016b). In this specific post, we can identify at least four attention-grabbing tools: frequent use of exclamation marks, capitalization of letters, hashtags, and the use of emotional words such as "DISASTER" or stylized words like "NOOOO!" to catch the eye. Similar features are used in my paper to define attention-grabbing posts.

Mertkovity highlights key aspects of attention-based politics used by Trump, including network logic, self-mediatization, popular politics, and populist communication. Network logic sees politicians creating and sharing their content, leading to personalized and subjective communication. Self-mediatization involves prompting traditional media reactions through actions that emphasize spectacle over substance. Popular politics aims to engage the typically uninterested public, while populist communication emphasizes a connection to the people through relatable speeches and symbols, fostering self-expression and collective identity online.

Personalization, spectacularization, emotional language, populist communication style, and stylistic features—such as distinctive use of punctuation marks, capitalization, and hashtags (Laucuka 2018) are all attention-grabbers. It is important to note that negative emotional language is particularly effective at capturing attention. Geer (2006) explains that negativity can prompt people to pay more attention and become more involved in politics, potentially increasing interest, turnout, and mobilization. Since populists are known for their use of emotional and particularly negative language, sensationalism, and frequent emphasis on their leaders, and given that Donald Trump is recognized as a populist leader (Neiheisel 2022) who predominantly uses such strategies, it can be inferred that populist parties and leaders commonly employ these attention-grabbing strategies.

I have touched on some stylistic features that grab attention, but a deeper exploration helps clarify their effectiveness and why populists favor them. Personalization is one of the attention-grabbing strategies, where politicians share details about their personal lives to appear more relatable and genuine, thus engaging the public effectively (Heiss, Schmuck, and Matthes 2019)

Populists often emphasize their leaders to humanize them more than mainstream parties do making their leaders central to their campaigns (Russmann 2022). For example, Strache was often depicted with his dog or in swimming trunks, and he frequently shared personal stories, like his wedding anniversary (Russmann, 2022). This suggests that personalization might be more prevalent in the posts of populist politicians.

The use of visual communication is also crucial for capturing attention in political messaging. (Kriesi 2014) They highlight the potency of images in evoking emotions and shaping political attitudes, suggesting a natural alignment with populist messaging (Kriesi 2014)

However, research by Farkas et al. (2022) indicates that visuals are not the main communication mode for populists, often resembling non-populist parties. Russmann's (2022) research shows that by 2017, all Austrian political parties, not just minor ones, had adopted enhanced visual communication on social media to boost authenticity and emotional appeal. Although initially expected to be more prevalent among populists as an attention-grabbing tactic, visual political communication has become common across the political spectrum.

2.3 Hypotheses formulation

To briefly summarize the main points, populist politicians, often overlooked by mainstream media, have effectively turned to social media as a strategic platform to communicate their messages, achieving notable success. This success might imply that populists are adept at using attention-grabbing tools to capture the public's attention. Furthermore, employing attention-

grabbing strategies frequently aligns well with the populist image and is less risky for them compared to mainstream parties, which are associated with more balanced and moderate communication styles.

Additionally, numerous studies have shown that populists tend to adopt a populist communication style more frequently than mainstream politicians, characterized by emotional, provocative, and simplified messaging—inherently attention-grabbing elements. This suggests that populists extensively utilize such strategies.

Given these observations, I hypothesize:

Central Hypothesis: populist parties and their leaders use attention-grabbing strategies on social media platforms more frequently than mainstream parties and their leaders.

To be able to test my evidence separately I am going to use 3 specific hypotheses that support the central hypothesis:

H1: Populist parties and their leaders use attention-grabbing tools in textual content more frequently than mainstream parties and their leaders.

H2: Populist parties and their leaders use exclamation marks more frequently than mainstream parties and their leaders.

H3: Populist parties and their leaders use visual communication more frequently than mainstream parties and their leaders.

3 The setting

Austria has a multiparty political system with 183 National Council members elected for five-year terms, unless early elections occur, like in 2017 and 2019. Citizens mainly participate in decision-making through these elections. Since 1945, Austria has typically been governed by coalition governments, primarily involving the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in a "grand coalition." However, minor parties have gained influence since the mid-1980s.

The populist right-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) has consistently been in Parliament and even governed with the ÖVP from 2017 to 2019. New parties like Jetzt–Pilz List and NEOS have also emerged, with NEOS remaining in Parliament since 2013. (Russmann, 2022)

Facebook was chosen as the platform for analysis because it remains the most widely used social network in the country (Statista, 2023). In September 2013, there were 3.2 million Facebook users in Austria. By 2019, this number had grown to 3.8 million users (Statista, 2019).

Recent literature identifies the FPÖ as a right-wing populist party (Aalberg et al. 2016)

Conversely, the ÖVP is categorized as a mainstream party according to the classification by Schmuck and Hameleers (2020).

4 Methodology

4.1 Data sources (AUTNES dataset) and data collection methods

4.1.1.1 Data Source

This thesis uses data which was developed by the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES), specifically "AUTNES Content Analysis of Facebook Pages 2017," This data set records Facebook posts from party pages and their leading candidates over the six weeks before the 2017 Austrian general election (from September 4, 2017, to October 14, 2017), analyzing a total of 2,769 posts from six different parties.

4.1.1.2 Data Collection

4.1.1.3 The data was gathered using web scraping techniques and manual coding, conducted by trained student coders under the direction of the AUTNES team. They utilized the Facebook API to collect technical details like the text content of the posts, user interaction counts, and URLs. For the manual coding, they captured screenshots of the posts a few hours after publication to replicate what Facebook users experience. (AUTNES, 2017)

4.2 Analytical methods (content analysis, quantification of features like visuals and exclamation marks)

I quantified the relative proportion (in terms of total posts) of visuals (already pre-coded in the dataset) and exclamation marks (quantified using Excel) used by each of the six parties, based on their individual posts within the total dataset of 2,769 posts. Special attention is given to the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), a right-wing populist party, and the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), a mainstream party. A detailed manual analysis was conducted on 999 posts—555 from FPÖ and 444 from ÖVP—to determine their use of attention-grabbing tools, marking attention-grabbing content as 1 and non-attention-grabbing as 0. I calculated the proportion of these tools relative to each party's total posts using Excel and visualized these proportions through graphs. Additionally, a time series analysis was performed to track the use of these tools during the six weeks leading up to the election, assessing the changes and calculating proportions weekly until the day before the election.

4.3 Criteria for identifying attention-grabbing tools

Drawing upon Merkovity (2017) and the works of Schmuck and Hameleers (2020), Grasso (2022), Lin et al.(2020), Nai (2018), Ernst et al.(2018), and Russmann (2022), I use qualitative content analysis to determine which textual contents are attention-grabbing.

Posts were classified as attention-grabbing if they included capitalized words like "YOU" or "it depends on YOUR every SINGLE vote", strong, radical words such as "catastrophic", "Disaster", "Must" and "scandalous," posts that included unique punctuation marks such as frequent use exclamation marks or emotive (mainly negative) language, as designated by Schmuck and Hameleers(2020) including terms like anger, hatred, disgust, failure, crisis, hope, joy, love, and success. Additionally, posts containing hashtags (Laukuca 2018), personalized posts (e.g Strache's post about his wedding anniversary), controversial phrases, or bold, catchy sentences like: "Vote FPÖ - the only force for necessary change" or "To make real change possible on October 15, we need your trust! #nowornever"(ÖVP) were also classified as

attention-grabbing. Posts that emphasized words that added intensity, like "immediately" and "urgently," spectacularized content with strong words starting sentences like "Shame!" and "Disgusted!" or posts that engaged in name-calling, mocked, made fun of or heavily criticized opposition using terms like "cheap copy", "dark side of the power," and "late bloomer," were indicated as attention-grabbing. Furthermore, interactive posts encouraging users to engage, comment, participate in a poll, or share their stories or photos were considered attention-grabbing. This systematic approach allowed for a comprehensive identification and categorization of posts employing specific attention-grabbing strategies.

5 Discussion of Findings

5.1 Comparative analysis of populist and mainstream parties' use of attention-grabbing tools in textual content

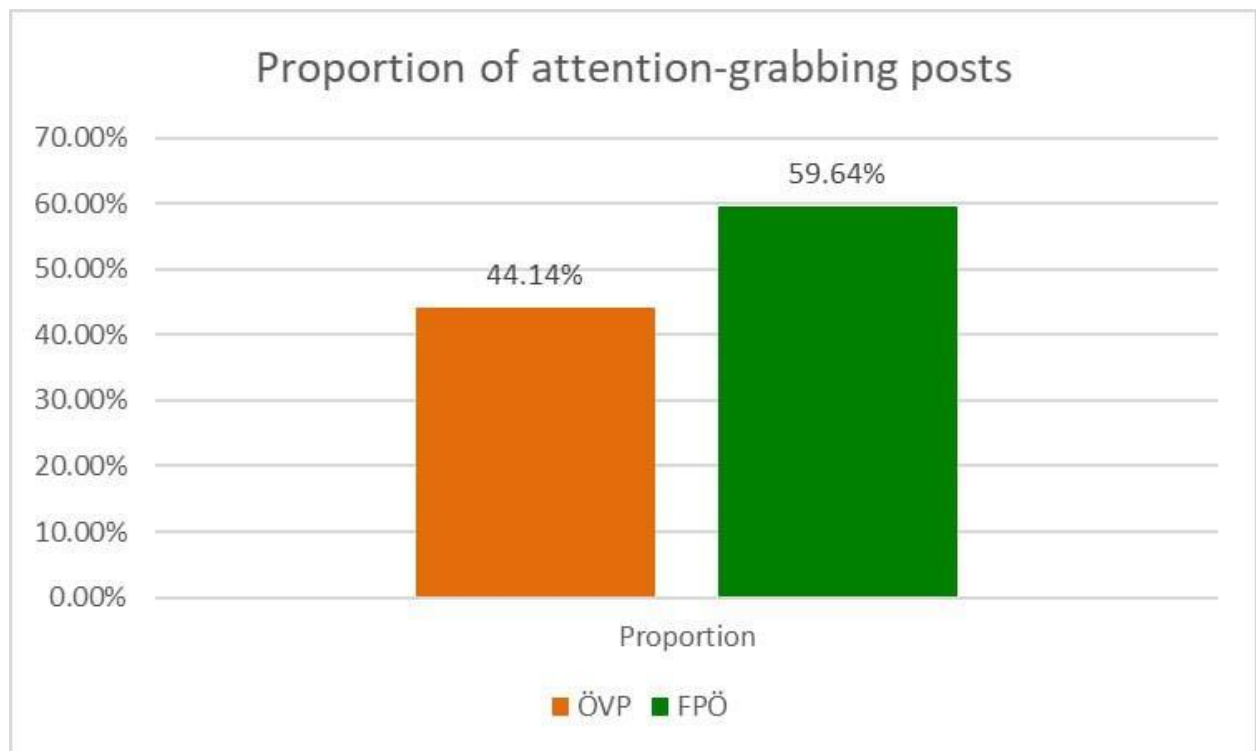


Figure 1: Proportion of attention-grabbing posts

This section presents the findings from the manual coding of attention-grabbing posts. The graph shows that FPÖ has a higher proportion of attention-grabbing posts (59.64%) compared to ÖVP (44.14%). This significant difference of about 15.5% indicates that FPÖ relies more heavily on attention-grabbing strategies in their textual content, supporting H1: Populist parties and their leaders use attention-grabbing tools in textual content more frequently than mainstream parties and their leaders.

5.1.1 FPÖ's approach

The FPÖ and their top candidate Strache mainly used scandalous, emotionally charged, provocative statements, similar to tactics employed by Donald Trump (Merkovity 2017), to grab people's attention. Their posts frequently engaged in name-calling such as calling Kurz and Kern the “Dark side of the power” or Kurz a “late bloomer”, making spectacularized statements, using fear, and speaking in a negative context. They heavily criticized the "black-red government," with black representing the ÖVP and red representing the SPÖ. Their frequent use of negative rhetoric aligns with Nai's (2021) findings, where the author concluded that populist campaigns worldwide are 15% more negative.

For instance, in one of Strache's posts, he wrote: “SPÖ Chancellor Kern, as then head of ÖBB, brought many of today's rapists and criminals to Austria on free trains and ÖVP Integration Minister Kurz happily welcomed them. I know that's a serious accusation. But it is the reality. And these people are supposed to lead Austria into the future? I say NO! There will only be positive change and fairness for the Austrians with a strong FPÖ!” (Strache, 2017b). This post demonstrates Strache's use of fear and strong accusations to criticize the opposition. Terms like "rapists" and "criminals," combined with the assertion of bringing them "on free trains," create a dramatic and negative narrative highlighting dissatisfaction with the SPÖ and ÖVP.

In another post, Strache emphasized the importance of each vote with capitalization: “It depends on YOUR every SINGLE vote!” (Strache, 2017c). The use of capitalization here is for grabbing attention and emphasizing urgency, making the message stand out more. The FPÖ and its top candidate used radical, emotionally charged language. For example, Strache wrote: “At the end of our lives, we will all hopefully look into the eyes of our children and grandchildren, if we are allowed to. And they will ask us: Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, have

you done everything in your life to hopefully give us a better, safer future? Have you done everything so that we don't become a minority in our own country and have to experience and suffer radical Islamist terror and threats - similar to the Middle East? Each and every one of us will have to answer these questions for ourselves and our children and grandchildren. And I hope everyone can answer YES with the utmost conviction” (Strache, 2017d). This strategy aims to evoke a strong emotional response from readers, making the political stakes feel more immediate and personal.

Strache also used exclamation marks extensively to emphasize his points, as well as proverbs such as “lies have short legs” to be more memorable and impactful (Strache, 2017e). Additionally, Strache included personal stories, such as posting about his anniversary: “Today is our first wedding anniversary. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my wife Philippa for all her love, warmth, loyalty, her caring nature, and her great support. You are wonderful and unique. I LOVE YOU!” (Strache, 2017f). These kinds of posts add a relatable and human element to Strache's public persona, which can strengthen the emotional connection with his audience. Strache frequently began posts with words like “annoyed”, “disgusted” or “next bombshell” to immediately catch attention and set a confrontational tone from the beginning of his posts.

5.1.2 ÖVP's approach

The ÖVP used more balanced and moderate language in posts, focusing on positive emotions and informational content. This observation is consistent with findings from other scholars (citations). For instance, this is the post of Sebastian Kurz: "I have discussed my ideas for Austria with practitioners and experts in Austria Talks throughout the country. Now we have presented the first part of our program - New Justice and Responsibility." (Kurz, 2017a). This post showcases the ÖVP's focus on balanced and positive communication. Kurz highlights

discussions with experts and introduces a new program, without using radical or provocative language.

In another example, Kurz discussed property issues: "Property is important for a free society. However, building up property is becoming increasingly difficult, especially for the younger generation. That is why we are also campaigning for change in our program" (Kurz, 2017b). This post illustrates the ÖVP's focus on policy issues without resorting to emotional rhetoric or sensationalism. The tone is informative, aiming to address societal concerns calmly.

While the ÖVP mainly talked about different issues without using too much emotional rhetoric, they still used some attention-grabbing strategies, they encouraged user engagement by asking followers to like, share, comment, or share personal stories. For example: "4 days until the election: We have 4 things for you to do today. Tag friends in the comments who might also support you! 1. Make house calls. 2. Have a persuasive conversation. 3. Download the Team Kurz app now: kurz-link.at/team-kurz-app. 4. Plan your election day" (Kurz, 2017c). This post showcases their interactive content to engage users.

The ÖVP avoided criticizing competitors. Close to the election, they repeatedly posted the same catchy statement: "We reject these dirty campaigning methods. October 15 is our chance for real change in this country!" (Kurz, 2017e). This statement was in response to the controversial campaign tactics allegedly used by the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ). The SPÖ was accused of "dirty campaigning" against Kurz and his party, the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), by hiring Israeli political consultant Tal Silberstein to create negative and misleading content. Kurz highlighted these unethical tactics to position himself as a candidate for genuine political change ahead of the October 15, 2017, elections (Guerrero 2018)

Strache's response to the situation was drastically different, highlighting the contrasting strategies between the politicians: “This whole dirt bucket story surrounding the current SPÖ/ÖVP government is just last class and indicative! The red-black dirty campaigning and bribery swamp should be drained. The reckoning will take place on October 15 - FPÖ!”

Overall, the ÖVP used fewer attention-grabbing tactics than the FPÖ but still incorporated some strategies to engage users. The ÖVP frequently used hashtags, such as #nowornever, to encourage interaction and participation without resorting to negative or sensational language. It is noteworthy that they greatly increased the frequency of using attention-grabbing tools as election day approached, which is quite interesting. I will discuss this aspect further in the time-series analysis in the following paragraphs.

These findings highlight a strategic divergence in the social media campaigns of the FPÖ and ÖVP and strongly support H1.

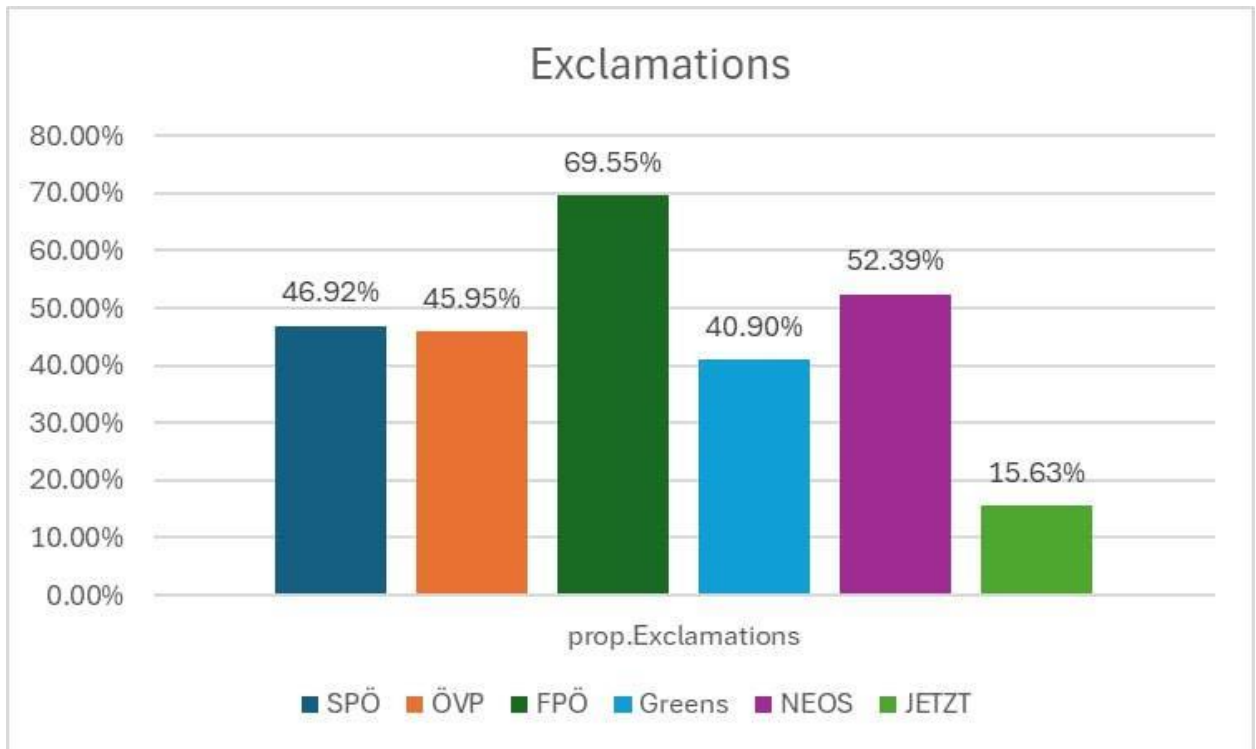


Figure 2: Proportion of exclamation points

5.2 Exclamation mark usage

From the graph, we can see that the FPÖ used exclamation marks in 69.55% of their posts, which is notably higher than the SPÖ (46.92%), ÖVP (45.95%), Greens (40.90%), NEOS (52.39%), and JETZT (15.63%). This significant difference highlights the FPÖ's strategy of using punctuation to create a more dramatic and urgent tone in their communications.

For example, one of Strache's posts reads: "Austria can only be saved with the FPÖ! I am counting on YOU!!!" This use of exclamation marks aims to evoke strong emotional responses and grab attention, similar to Trump's style (Mertkovity, 2017).

The results show that the FPÖ, a populist party, used exclamation marks significantly more than the mainstream party ÖVP, with a difference of 24%. This underscores the FPÖ's reliance on more attention-grabbing tools in their textual content and supports Hypothesis 2: Populist parties and their leaders use exclamation marks more frequently than mainstream parties and their leaders.

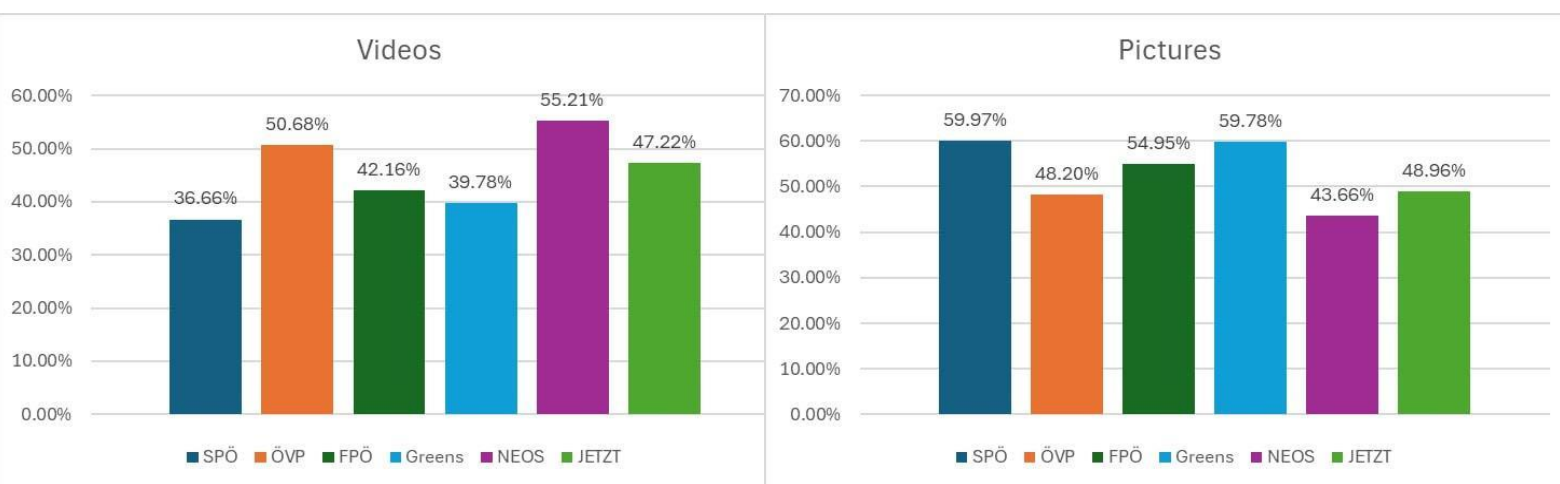


Figure 3: proportion of videos

Figure 4: Proportion of pictures

Visual Communication

5.2.1.1 The analysis shows that NEOS leads in video usage, followed by ÖVP and JETZT. FPÖ uses videos less than NEOS and ÖVP but more than SPÖ and the Greens, indicating different visual engagement strategies across parties.

5.2.1.2 In the case of pictures, SPÖ and the Greens have the highest picture usage, showing a strong preference for image-based communication. FPÖ also uses a significant amount of pictures, while JETZT, ÖVP, and NEOS use them less frequently, reflecting varied campaign tactics.

5.2.1.3 Combined Analysis

While the first two findings support my central hypothesis, the evidence for H3: that populist parties use more visual communication than mainstream parties, is not as strong. Combining both photos and videos, two of my focus parties: ÖVP and FPÖ used a similar amount of visual communication. In the case of videos, ÖVP had a higher proportion, whereas for images, FPÖ had a higher proportion.

These findings suggest that all parties recognize the importance of visual communication. Interestingly, even mainstream parties used more visual communication than the populist FPÖ. The lack of a significant difference between populist and non-populist parties, and the even higher frequency of visual communication by mainstream parties, aligns with a study by Farkas et al. (2022), which found that images are not the primary mode of communication for populists.

Although the use of visual communication was correlated with populist messaging (Kriesi, 2014), this assumed correlation has not been supported by evidence. Therefore, H3 is not confirmed.

5.3 Time-series analysis of party strategies leading up to the election: Tracking the Frequency of Attention-Grabbing Tools

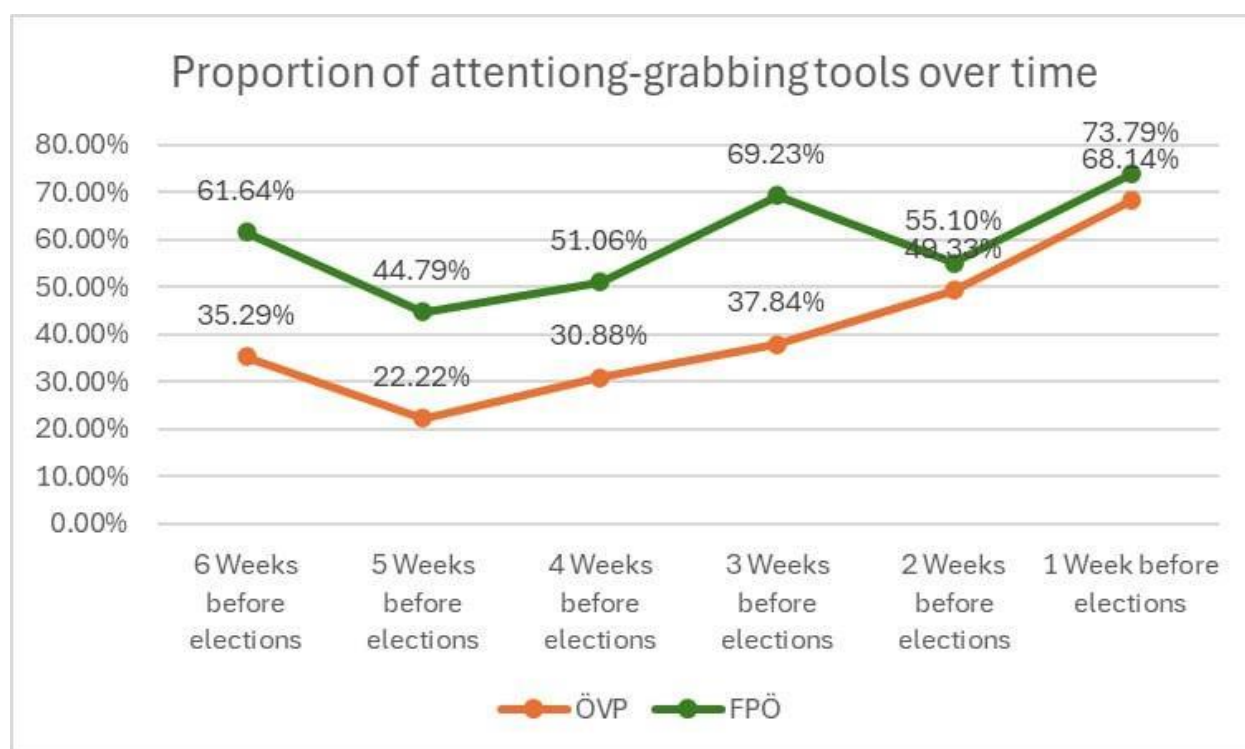


Figure 5: Proportion of Attention-Grabbing Posts Over Time

Additionally, I conducted a time-series analysis to examine whether parties increased the use of attention-grabbing tools as election day approached and to observe how both populist and mainstream parties, along with their leaders, changed the frequency of using these strategies.

Both the FPÖ and the ÖVP increased their use of these tools as the election day neared. The FPÖ consistently used attention-grabbing strategies more frequently, but the difference between the two parties was not as large as expected towards the end.

In the qualitative analysis of textual posts, I noticed that towards the end of the campaign, both parties predominantly used short, catchy phrases. Examples from the FPÖ include “Let’s vote

for forward thinkers rather than late bloomers. Real change is only possible with the FPÖ” (Strache, 2017). Similarly, the ÖVP used phrases like “Your vote for Sebastian Kurz will bring real change to our country. We ask for your trust. #nowornever” (Kurz, 2017).

While the FPÖ continued to emphasize chaotic and problematic years under the red-black government, frequently calling Kurz a late bloomer and heavily emphasizing fairness and security, the ÖVP increased the use of hashtags, started a countdown to the elections, and adopted short slogans. One of their most frequently used hashtags was #nowornever, which is quite eye-catching. This aligns with Grasso's (2022) findings that hashtag usage intensifies during elections to attract voter support on divisive issues.

The reasons behind this shift are not entirely clear, but it could be speculated that as the elections drew close, using similar strategies was not seen as risky for their image. They still maintained a relatively balanced approach while focusing on garnering as much attention as possible. Additionally, there was not enough time left for long, informational posts, leading both parties to focus on attention-grabbing tactics.

This observation opens paths for future research: Why did both parties increase the use of attention-grabbing strategies as the election approached? Why did the mainstream party not use these strategies earlier if they were going to utilize them towards the end? If they aimed to maintain their image, why would they resort to these strategies right before the election? Understanding the answers to these questions could provide deeper insights into the dynamics of political communication strategies in the lead-up to elections.

5.4 Limitations

This study relies on data from 2017, which may not fully capture the current dynamics of social media usage. Despite this temporal limitation, research by Russmann (2022) suggests that the fundamental social media strategies employed by the FPÖ and ÖVP have not undergone significant changes through to 2019, supporting the relevance of the data period. Also, the study only analyzed posts from the six weeks leading up to the election. Analyzing posts over a longer period, including after the election, would give a fuller picture of the strategies used and how they might change once the election is over.

Furthermore, the original dataset was in German and required translation into English. Although translations were conducted using DeepL Translator, a highly regarded machine translation tool, some nuances and accuracies may have been lost in the process.

Another limitation stems from the solo coding of the dataset without external validation, which could introduce subjectivity into the analysis. To mitigate this and enhance objectivity, political party names were segregated from the coding data. This approach enabled coding of the posts without prior knowledge of the authors, aiming to preserve the impartiality of the content analysis.

6 Final Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study partially support the central hypothesis that populist parties and their leaders use attention-grabbing strategies more frequently on social media than mainstream parties and their leaders. While the use of exclamation marks and textual analysis showed a higher frequency of attention-grabbing methods in the FPÖ's posts compared to the ÖVP, visual communication—a critical attention-grabbing tool—was not predominantly used by the

populist party. This suggests that all parties, regardless of type, are adapting to the digital environment to capture attention, as also noted by Russmann (2022) and Grasso (2022).

The data reveals that the FPÖ, a right-wing populist party, employs significantly more attention-grabbing tactics than the ÖVP. This strategy includes the use of emotionally charged, negative language, unique stylistic features, and provocative statements, aligning with the party's populist identity, and proving effective in engaging voters on social media. In contrast, the ÖVP opts for a more measured and policy-focused communication style, reflecting its mainstream orientation. These findings are consistent with Nai's (2021) description of populist politicians' communication tactics, particularly his observation that populist campaigns worldwide are significantly more negative. Furthermore, these results align with Lin et al.'s (2023) findings, which suggest that mainstream parties generally adopt a more moderate and policy-oriented approach.

This divergence underscores the strategic differences in digital campaigning and highlights the evolving nature of political communication where immediacy and visibility are crucial, especially as elections approach.

This thesis examines the critical role of attention-grabbing strategies in political communication, focusing on the use of social media by populist and mainstream parties during the 2017 Austrian elections. It details and compares how these parties employ distinct communication tactics to capture public attention in an environment where information is abundant but attention is limited (Davenport and Beck 2001; Goldhaber 1997).

The findings reveal that both populist and mainstream parties modify their strategies to address the demands of the attention economy, a trend that Russmann (2022) has observed. This adaptation becomes particularly evident as elections approach and the competition for voter attention intensifies.

The exploration of these strategies suggests areas for further research, such as investigating the long-term effects on voter behavior and loyalty, are voters who are attracted by attention-grabbing tactics more likely to remain loyal to a party, or are they swayed only in the short term? and why both, populist and mainstream parties ramp up attention-grabbing tactics near elections even though it might affect their image. Future studies could also examine the psychological and emotional impacts of these strategies on voters, to better understand how they affect voter decision-making processes.

In summary, this thesis enhances our understanding of political communication in the digital age by emphasizing the role of attention-grabbing strategies. It establishes a correlation between the higher usage of attention-grabbing tools and populists. This insight is crucial for understanding the dynamics of political influence and voter manipulation in contemporary politics, helping to maintain a healthy democratic process and assisting voters in making informed decisions.

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