

# Politics in Digital Society

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## English Summary

*This thesis departs from the fact, that the use of social media platforms has become a precondition for politicians and parties, where social media have been presented as new opportunities to reach and engage voters, bypassing mass media, and levelling the political playing field. Now, however, politicians and parties face the limitations and control of platforms, and must submit to new forms of media logic, increased mediatization of politics.*

To comprehend this transformative shift, we must understand that digital and social media permeate all aspects of society, that we now live in a digital society. Sociologist Deborah Lupton have noted that “... the very idea of ‘culture’ or ‘society’ cannot now be fully understood without the recognition that computer software and hardware devices not only underpin but actively constitute selfhood, embodiment, social life, social relations and social institutions” (Lupton, 2014). This is certainly true in politics too.

This thesis is contextualized within the formal arena of national politics in Denmark, including the Danish media system and the specificity of Danish political culture. Throughout the thesis, I focus on how social media platforms are used by Danish politicians, as an illustration of how the transformative power of platforms impacts formal politics, i.e., how politics is exercised and performed by politicians and political parties in election campaigns as well as in agenda-setting in everyday politics.

The methodological approach of the thesis takes the form of an inductive, observational mapping of political life on social media and beyond in Denmark. This approach does in no way imply that the thesis is detached from theory. On the contrary, the overall argument is based on the conceptualisation of social media as a new form of social interaction, *mediated online interaction*, that takes place on media and technology platforms with distinct *media logics* of their own and which contributes to an increased *mediatization* of political communication culture and society.

In practical terms, I explore three empirical cases. The first case, *Governing with Social Media*, is an introduction to the field of digital political communication in Denmark and how the party leaders and Members of Parliament use social media. In the second case, *Breaking the Agenda*, I explore how social media platforms are used for setting the agenda on social media platforms and in the news media. The primary focus is on how live streaming video is used in context of political events. Finally, in the last case, *Danish Elections and Campaigning*, I unfold how social media have been used in the past general elections.

Among the main findings are that politicians are increasingly using multiple social media platforms to set the political agenda, stay visible to the voters and the news media, and cultivate the personal candidacy. Adding to this, although it is not possible to say that the use of social media will guarantee an election win, it seems clear that it has become virtually impossible to get elected without the use of social media.

With this thesis, I aim to contribute to the limited, but emerging field of research in political communication on social media in Denmark. The field needs attention, if we want to understand the wider impact of social media on politics in digital society. As such, this thesis does not mark the end of research, but rather it is a part of the initial mapping of a growing research field, which I hope to explore more in the future.



## Dansk resumé

*Denne afhandling tager udgangspunkt i, at brugen af sociale medie platforme er blevet en forudsætning for politikere og partier i dag. Sociale medier er blevet fremstillet som en ny mulighed for at nå og engagere vælgerne, som en mulighed for at omgå massemedier, og som en mulighed for at udligne forskellene i det politiske landskab. Men i dag betyder brugen af sociale medier også at politikere og partier må leve med de begrænsninger og den kontrol, disse platforme udøver, og at de må underordne sig nye medielogikker, den øgede medialisering af politik.*

For at forstå dette skifte, må vi forstå, at digitale og sociale medier gennemsyrrer alle dele af samfundet, og at vi nu lever i et digitale samfund. Sociologen Deborah Lupton har observeret at "... the very idea of 'culture' or 'society' cannot now be fully understood without the recognition that computer software and hardware devices not only underpin but actively constitute selfhood, embodiment, social life, social relations and social institutions" (Lupton, 2014). Den betragtning gælder også for politik.

Denne afhandling skal ses i kontekst af den formelle politiske arena i Danmark, herunder det danske mediesystem og den specifikke danske politiske kommunikationskultur. I afhandlingen fokuserer jeg på, hvordan sociale medieplatforme bliver brugt af danske politikere, som en illustration af, hvordan disse platforme og den magt de udøver påvirker den formelle politiske arena, det vil sige, hvordan politik bliver udført af politikere og politiske partier i valgkampe, såvel som i den agenda-setting, som finder sted imellem valgkampene.

Den metodologiske tilgang i afhandlingen bygger på en induktiv og observerende kortlægning af det politiske liv på sociale medier i Danmark. Tilgangen betyder ikke, at afhandlingen ikke bygger på et teoretisk fundament. Tværtimod er det gennemgående argument, at kommunikationen på sociale medier udgør en ny form for social interaktion, der kan beskrives som *medieret online interaktion*, som finder sted på medie- og teknologiplatforme, der er drevet af en egen entydig *medielogik*, og som bidrager til en øget medialisering af den politiske kommunikationskultur og samfundet i sin helhed.

Afhandlingens empiriske del består af tre forskellige cases. Den første case, *Governing with Social Media*, er en general introduktion til hvordan digital politisk kommunikation udfolder sig i Danmark. I den anden case, *Breaking the Agenda*, undersøger jeg, hvorledes sociale medier bliver brugt til at sætte den politiske dagsorden. Det primære fokus er her på, hvordan live-streaming video anvendes i forbindelse med politiske begivenheder. I den tredje case,

*Danish Elections and Campaigning*, undersøger jeg, hvordan sociale medier er blevet anvendt i valgkampene i 2011, 2015 og 2019.

Blandt de overordnede fund er, at politikere i stigende grad anvender flere sociale medier for at være i stand til at sætte den politiske dagsorden. Politikerne må i stigende grad være synlig for vælgerne og nyhedsmedier, og samtidig må de kultivere deres personlige kandidatur. Derudover kan det tilføjes, at alt imens det ikke er muligt at sige at sociale medier vil sikre en valgsejr, er det blevet klart, at det stort set er umuligt at vinde valg uden.

Med afhandlingen ønsker jeg at bidrage til et forskningsfelt, der omfatter brugen af sociale medier til politisk kommunikation, der for nuværende er begrænset. Hvis vi ønsker at forstå, hvordan den politiske kommunikation udfolder sig og hvilken betydning sociale medier har for det politiske liv i det digitale samfund, er det nødvendigt med mere forskning i fremtiden.

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Photo of broadcast on TV2 News, on June 25, 2019.

## 1. Politics in Digital Society

In the wake of one of the longest election campaigns in recent Danish history, in 2019 the majority shifted in the Danish Parliament, *Folketinget*. In the national election held in early June that year, the Social Democrats had secured an electoral victory with the promises of support from the Socialist People's Party, the Social Liberal Party, and the Red-Green Alliance. Following the election, the party leader for the Social Democrats, Mette Frederiksen, was appointed royal investigator tasked with the mission to form a new government. For the winning parties to achieve success in the investigations, they still had to secure a political agreement for the foundation of a new government, and so the parties entered into negotiations at Christiansborg, home of the Danish parliament. Eager to be the first to report on the outcome of the negotiations, Danish news media set up camp just outside the conference rooms where negotiations took place. The negotiations never looked like an easy task, and for weeks the news media idled away on live television while journalists and pundits speculated on the ups and downs of the parties or tried to get meaningful insights from passing politicians going to and from the negotiations. Close to midnight on June 25<sup>th</sup>, after three weeks of tense negotiations between the parties, the Danish Social Party successfully formed a new minority government under the leadership of party leader Mette Frederiksen. To celebrate the successful conclusion of the negotiations, party leader of the Socialist Peoples' Party, Pia Olsen Dyhr (2019) tweeted a picture of the happy negotiators in the conference room accompanied with the text:

“It is a good evening :-) We will have a new red-green government in Denmark #dkpol”.

Minutes after the tweet, as the news was travelling fast on social media, reporters, unable to reach any of the involved politicians, had no other choice than to resort to their smartphones and show the tweet to the viewers.

It was – by far – not the first time an important decision or event was announced on social media. In the past decade, Paul Saffo’s truism, that “news doesn’t break, it tweets” (Saffo, 2008), has become increasingly true in Danish politics, like elsewhere. But it was not politics as usual either. Paolo Gerbaudo (2019c) has observed, that today political influence is “measured in part through social media metrics: likes, followers, and shares. A politician’s Twitter prowess – or lack thereof – can make or break a political career. If social media was once considered a secondary space for political communication, it is vastly outstripping TV as the medium of choice for political communication”. Incoming Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, who had successfully transformed her party’s political agenda, could now see her moment of success in the news media stolen away from her by the party leader of the Socialist Peoples’ Party. But Pia Olsen Dyhr’s tweet did more than just break the news of the new government. Circumventing the news media, Pia Olsen Dyhr established her own narrative that the new government’s policies would be leftist and controlled by the left-wing parties. This narrative was instantly adopted and replayed endlessly in the news media.

As such, this event is an illustration of the ongoing change pushed by new technologies and meta-processes of new social media logic reconfiguring media power and mediatizing politics and culture. In this process of constant change taking place in the past three decades, the Internet and social media have become mundane parts of everyday life in Denmark. Like citizens in other European countries, Danes increasingly get their news on social media platforms, with Facebook as their preferred platform in terms of news consumption (Newman et al., 2017), and as the platform most widely used (Runge, 2016, 2017). Platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter, have become fixed components in a wider field of communication, that includes a broad repertoire of *Information and Communication Technologies* (ICTs), like webpages and blogs. These platforms enable Danish politicians and parties to bypass legacy mass media, engage and mobilize supporters, connect, reach, and inform voters, and harness advertising and remarketing across multiple platforms, just to name a few of the new possibilities within the field.

### **Digital Society**

In plain terms, digital political communication, the strategic use of digital and social media, has fundamentally transformed the relationship between

political elites and media elites. It has changed the interplay between parties and news media, and just as importantly, it has repeatedly upset the balance among politicians and parties as well. For many politicians and parties, social media platforms are perceived as necessary, but complicated communications and campaign tools, which require them to have or acquire special knowledge and strategies and communicative competences. They also required to be skilled in content creation, which they need to master routinely to secure election wins, share their visions, and remain viable candidates. By doing so, they become part of a new transformative digital culture.

To comprehend this transformative shift, we must understand that digital and social media permeate all aspects of society, that we now live in a digital society. Sociologist Deborah Lupton have noted that “... the very idea of ‘culture’ or ‘society’ cannot now be fully understood without the recognition that computer software and hardware devices not only underpin but actively constitute selfhood, embodiment, social life, social relations and social institutions” (Lupton, 2014). This is certainly true in politics too. The pervasive use of social media has become ever more present with the increased use of mobile devices and smartphones (Blombäck & Sandberg, 2018; Nehren, 2013). As many researchers have pointed out, the use of social media platforms has become a precondition for politicians and parties’ communications and campaigning. Current research has established, that social digital platforms are reshaping the interplay with mass media, transforming established modes of participation, and creating new forms of engagement, as well as restructuring interactions between citizens and politicians.

In sum, research shows the use of social media platforms has become a precondition for most politicians and parties’ strategic communications and election campaigning (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015; Bode & Dalrymple, 2016; Elmer & Langlois, 2013; G. S. Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), as well as in the reshaping of the interplay with legacy mass media (Bode, 2016a; Cushion & Thomas, 2013; Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2017; Skogerbø & Krumsvik, 2015). More than this, the use of digital and social media, as noted by Mazzoleni and Schulz, has led to a “shift from mass media to interactive media”, and a move from “monological to dialogical communication” as well, and as such, the new digital platforms provide an “enlargement of the possibilities for participation” (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999: 254).

It is important to understand that social media platforms are not just technological extensions of previous media types or communication modes. They represent entirely new ways of communicating and interacting among friends, families, citizens, media, as well as politicians and parties. To put this

understanding in perspective, I draw on the interactional theory put forward by J. B. Thompson (1995, 2020). Communication media can only be understood and analysed in their relationship to society, in the action and interaction which they make possible and create. Thompson argues that “we must begin by rejecting the intuitively plausible idea that communication media merely transmit information and symbolic content to individuals whose relations with one another remain essentially unchanged. We must see instead that the use of communication media involves the creation of new forms of action and interaction, new kinds of social relationships, and new ways of relating to others and to oneself” (Thompson, 2020: 4).

Thompson distinguishes between four basic types of communication. The first form of communication is *face-to-face interaction*, which requires individuals to be co-present. It is dialogical, and it “involves a multiplicity of symbolic cues – gestures and facial expressions as well as words, smells and touch (at least potentially) and other sounds and visual cues”. The second form of communication is *mediated interaction*, which involves technology to enable sharing and communicating information to individuals who are remote in space or time. It is dialogical in character, but with a narrow range of symbolic cues. The third form of communication is *mediated quasi-interaction*, which involves the stretching of social relations across space and time, and it involves a certain narrowing of the range of symbolic clues. Mediated quasi-interaction is monological – the flow of communication is one-way and oriented towards an indefinite range of potential recipients. We know mediated quasi-interaction from forms of mass media, such as television, radio, and newspapers. The new form of communication, which Thompson refer to as *mediated online interaction*, is the form of interaction that is created by computer-mediated communication. In mediated online interaction, interaction can stretch social relations across space and time. It involves a narrowing of the range of symbolic clues and it is oriented towards a multiplicity of other recipients. Mediated online interaction enables many-to-many communication.

This new form of communication has transformed established modes of political participation and created a wide range of new forms of engagement (Bimber et al., 2015; D’heer & Verdegem, 2013; Margetts et al., 2015), and it has restructured the interactions between citizens and politicians (Agarwal et al., 2014; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; R. K. Gibson et al., 2013). In a society saturated with media and technology, politicians and parties are not only political actors trying to inform citizens and influence opinion in the public sphere by setting the political agenda in legacy mass media, they are themselves also active participants on social media platforms. Here they have become users in a media ecology where social media platforms have become

part of everyday politics (Highfield, 2016), and as users they are conforming to the technological and ideological foundations of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), as well as to the practices, norms and values of social networking sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), like Facebook and Twitter. But they are more than mere users of the platforms. By definition, politicians are part of the political elite, and since they in general enjoy prominence and high visibility within the media system, they exert greater influence on the agenda by default, in legacy news media and on social media platforms, than most other citizens. Traditionally, media power was reserved for party leaders or very prominent politicians, but since media power is shifting, and by now often measured in visibility, metrics, engagement and interactions, the political elite now includes populists, hyperleaders with digital superbases, celebrity politicians, fringe demagogues, and disgruntled backbenchers.

Social media platforms make it possible for politicians to bypass or exert pressure on the news media (Hester, 1969; Katz, 1988; Kjeldsen, 2016; Runge, 2013b) and communicate with the public beyond the editorial control of journalists (Bruns, 2005). Adding to the modes of disintermediation, understood as bypassing legacy mass media, social media have also changed the balance of power within established parties, where politicians are now able to vent their diverging views beyond the control of party channels and circumvent political processes. Tech savvy politicians, who embrace social media platforms and their strategic potential, are now able to be present in multiple media spheres simultaneously, expanding their ability to increase salience of issues, influence agendas across platforms, and in effect control the narrative of political events. Politicians, who do not master social media, seem out of touch with present day society and slowly lose the possibility to shape public opinion. Paradoxically, social media platforms which were envisioned to liberate users, who had “nothing to lose but their chains” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), now subject users to the very logic of social media platforms (Kalsnes et al., 2017; José van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Adding to the paradox is, that while social media platforms may have given politicians greater autonomy, mass media, including the broadcast news media, remain powerful societal institutions, now operating within a hybrid media system, which is, as I will argue, dominated by multiple and competing media logics.

Since I finished my master studies at the University of Copenhagen in 2013, with a thesis on the emerging use of social media in politics, it has been clear to me that this research area is interesting on a personal level, I have always been very interested in politics and communication, as well on a professional level, where I have worked as a communication consultant and as a political commentator for Danish news media and television. I have explored the area

at every given opportunity, but I have also been surprised by the lack of academic research within the area. Beyond a few researchers scattered about on different universities, the interest and research in the area have seemed superficial and very limited. At the moment, there is no coherent research strategy at any university in Denmark, nor any interest or support for this kind of research, and had it not been for the dedication by these few scholars, we would not have any research to speak of on the use of social media and politics in Denmark. As it is, this thesis may be the end point on my PhD-studies, but it is only a small contribution to a area that needs much more research and many more researchers.

### **The Research Questions**

Change can sometimes be spectacular, surprising to the public, and even seem revolutionary, but the main argument of this dissertation is, that the changing practices of political communication, of agenda-setting (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; M. E. McCombs, 2014; M. E. McCombs & Shaw, 1972b) or election campaigning (Anstead & Chadwick, 2009; Elmer et al., 2012; Norris, 2000), in reality are parts of a larger ongoing *slow* process of overall changes within the media ecology and politics (Skogerbø & Krumsvik, 2015; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2010) as well as within society as a whole. These changes are instantiated by new forms of information and communication technologies, and networked media logics (Klinger & Svensson, 2015a) in a media multiplex (Haythornthwaite, 2002, 2005) and hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), which twists and turns our cultures, remolds institutions, and presents itself as challenges for modern democracy (Altheide, 2013; Van Aelst et al., 2017). Yet at the same time, it remains clear that the same media logic that drives social media platforms conforms to regulation, is constrained by or in competition with other forms of institutional logics, as well as existing political culture, norms, and values. To examine this claim further, the first research question, the dissertation explores is this: Does Danish candidates use of social media platforms exert an agenda-setting influence? And if so, how is it practiced?

Secondly, if digital and social media platforms have changed the agenda-setting practices in politics, how have candidates presented their issues and ideas depending on a variety of different contexts? It could be in the context of competition with other candidates from other parties (interparty competition) or the other candidates from their own party (intraparty competition). It could be in context of in elections with different locative perspectives, but also the order of elections or referendums. And it could be in context of the party organization and party discipline, thus covering different types of politicians from party leaders to back benchers. The second question the thesis therefore explores is: Why and in which ways do Danish

candidates submit to the logic of social media platforms in their political communication?

Finally, building on the empirical findings of the first research questions, the logics of social media platforms and mediatization, my examination is extended to include an understanding of this process of change, in which mass media are not just substituted by new digital media, but are extended, amalgamated, or indeed, even accommodate new media technologies, types and forms (W. Schulz, 2004). Since platforms have become a precondition for political communication, and the interplay between politicians, news media, and voters have changed and become more complex, the third research question the thesis explores is: What are the candidates' possibilities and limitations for setting the agenda in the political debates and election campaigns, when social media have become a precondition for political communications?

The thesis has its limitations. There are several areas, which I had planned to cover, such as party organisation and politics, local and regional politics and elections, elections for the European Parliament, and national referendums, and political advertising and targeting on social media. And in the course of the work with the thesis, it has become clear to me, that we need much more research on the wider aspects of political culture, political news, and political power, comparative studies of social media and politics in the Nordic countries, as well as a comprehensive study of social media and politics within the Danish realm, that is in the Faroe Islands and Greenland as well.

### **The Outline of the Thesis**

The thesis is conceptually divided into two parts. The first part deals with the methodology and theories, contexts, research design and methods applied in order to address the research questions. The second part consists of three empirical cases, *Governing with Social Media*, *Breaking the Agenda*, and *Danish Elections and Campaigning*, examining the research questions in practice.

### **Foundations of Social Media and Politics**

In the first part of the chapter, Foundations of Social Media and Politics, I outline the methodological and theoretical foundations for the thesis. The chapter is conceptually divided into three parts. In the first part, I outline the methodological approach of the thesis, which takes the form of an inductive, observational mapping of political life on social media and beyond in Denmark. This does not mean that the thesis is detached from theory. On the contrary, it draws on communication theory, and theories of media logic and mediatization. In the second part, I frame my research within three overall

arguments which guide the thesis. The first argument concerns politics and media, the second is about the locative space of media, and in the third argument I explore the contexts of research into social media and politics. In the third part, I explore theories of social media, before I proceed to the main theoretical framework for this thesis, which includes media logic, social media logic, and mediatization.

### **The Danish Case**

The third chapter of the thesis, *The Danish Case: Social Media and Politics*, focuses on the situational understanding of political communication on social and digital media, that is on the contexts also informing media use. First, I make a short introduction to the Danish society, which includes three different contexts, the political system, the media system, and the state of Danish research. If we wish to understand how social media platforms are used in Danish politics, an understanding of these contexts is necessary. Secondly, I explore Danish research into digital and social media and politics for the past decades to ground my thesis in the work done previously.

### **Research Design and Digital Methods**

In the first part of the chapter, Research Design and Digital Methods, I outline the overall research design for the thesis, which is based on complementary methods to support the thesis' analytical framework. As such the research framework is based on theories on how communication is structured by social media logics and how it can be understood as a transformative rationality which adds to the mediatization of politics (Hjarvard, 2008, 2013). Within this framework, the dissertation draws on current theories on political agenda-setting and online campaigning. I suggest, that if media logics is about the rules of the game, then mediatization is about how the game is played. In the second part of the chapter, I explore the selection of cases and how digital methods have been applied in the study of the empirical cases of the thesis.

### **The Cases**

In the second part of the thesis, I explore three empirical cases: The first case, *Governing with Social Media*, serves as an introduction to the field of political communication in Denmark and how the Danish Members of Parliament use social media in everyday politics. In the second case, *Breaking the Agenda*, I explore how social media platforms have been used to set the political agenda in Danish politics, with the focus is on the use of live streaming video. Finally, in the last case, *Danish Elections and Campaigning*, I explore how social media platforms have been used in the past general elections from 2011 to 2019.



## **Contributions**

With this dissertation, I aim to describe the uptake of social media in a specific political and cultural context over an extended period of time, and at certain pivotal moments in local political history. To do this, I develop and present an analytical framework for the study of formal political communication online, based on digital methods and bridging the gaps between quantitative and qualitative research. This framework combines the study of user generated content and sharing with social media logic, allows for an analysis of the concrete practises taking place on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and eventually, opens to an analysis of the wider impact on politics in digital society. In doing so, I wish to provide a comprehensive and grounded understanding of the use of social media platforms in Danish politics in the past years, but also a viable framework for future research, that has been missing so far.

With the thesis I hope to contribute to the Danish research on the impact of social media on Danish politics, but I also aim to position social media as a form of communication which is grounded in the national politics and that can be used as a methodological backdrop for comparative studies based on social media logic and mediatization.

## 2. Foundations of Social Media and Politics

The overall purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodological and theoretical foundations for the study of social media and politics.

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I outline the overall methodological approach of the thesis, which takes the form of an inductive, observational mapping of political life on social media and beyond in Denmark. This methodological approach does in no way imply that the thesis is detached from theory. To overcome the ontological gaps and epistemological challenges caused by paradigmatic shifts within media technology, and transformations in the political communication culture, the theoretical approach is informed by established theories of how politics and media are related. The thesis is primarily informed by established theories from media studies, in particular theories of *media logic* and *mediatization theory*, but it is also informed by views which are represented in leading theories within the field, such as *Actor Network Theory* in the areas of platforms and infrastructures and *digital sociology* within digital networks and politics, as well as well-established short range theories of media effects, such as two-step flow-communication and agenda-setting.

In the second part, I frame research within three different arguments which guide this thesis. The three arguments share the need for a contextualisation of research of the use of social media in politics. The first argument concerns *Politics and Media*. Here I argue two points. The first point is, that *conflict* is endemic to politics. The second is that politics is as much a social phenomenon, as it is a matter of ideological beliefs or economic interests. In the second argument, *Spaces and Places*, I argue that research needs to revisit the concept of the locative *media space of politics* which has been widely regarded as a universal, global space, and instead contextualise it within national politics, the national political communication culture, and the societal institutions of the nation state. As such, research into the media space of politics should be situated in these locative spaces. In the final argument, *Americana*, I explore the origins of research into social media and politics, which is overwhelmingly American. Here my argument is that political communication develops is part of a complex interplay between civic life, culture, media, and political institutions, and therefore research must be grounded in context of national politics and media systems, e.g., the Danish arena, if we wish to understand the influence and importance of social media in politics within the specific cultures and systems.

In the third part, I explore past and current theories of social media, social networking sites, platforms, and infrastructures, before I continue to the main theoretical framework for this thesis of media logic, social media logic, and mediatization.

In concluding the chapter, I point to some of the main theoretical considerations operationalised for the empirical research of the thesis.

### **Methodological Approach**

The methodology of this thesis takes the form of an inductive, observational mapping at the intersection of political life in Denmark, including the actions and interactions on social and digital media within the field of political communication in Denmark. As such, it is also an examination of how social media is related to technology and culture, and to power and democracy in digital society as well. To research politics on digital and social media, we need to have a clear understanding of how social media platforms operate, what their institutional roles are, how they shape the interplay between the actors in the political system as well as the political communication culture and society. And that we need to understand these matters on a theoretical level and explore them through empirical studies.

This thesis is about how digital and social media platforms change politics in Denmark. The premise is that political communication, here broadly understood as the social and cultural actions and interactions between the actors in the political system, mainly takes place in different forms of media. Obviously, political communication does not take place in the media exclusively. Politicians still campaign from door to door and meet the voters in the streets, face-to-face. They pass out flyers, put up elections posters, and participate in local events, they are active in the local party branches, and cultural communities in their constituencies, some politicians live among the voters they are elected to represent. Some of these forms of political communication still represent significant and valuable social interactions between politicians and citizens, and some are still important for politicians, political organizations, and parties. Some forms seem to hold very little real value for social life today and by themselves they have less or no value in terms of electoral effects, but when they are performed and shared repetitiously through social media, they serve to present an often idealised image of the model politician: The competent politician who is part of the political culture and knows the tradecraft of the political game.

Often, when researchers set out to examine what effects media use have produced, what changes media use have brought. Less research is done on how media are constructed and operated, and in turn how media change sociality and shape society. Paradoxically, as social media have taken the

centre stage in public debates on the state of democracy and political communication, remarkably little attention is paid to the effects on the political communication culture and the changes caused by new media forms, and more to how political communication on social media influence and affect the individual voter and thus the electoral outcome. The latter *is* important, but it should be contextualised within the political communication culture.

### **Theoretical Approach(es)**

The central argument of the thesis is that the use of social media, like Facebook and Twitter, has become a precondition for politicians' interactions with citizens and their election campaigning. Social media platforms have been portrayed as new opportunities to reach and engage voters, making way for new voices in politics and levelling the political playing field, and not least, social media platforms have allowed politicians to bypass the news media. In that process, Internet based digital and social media platforms have challenged the agenda-setting power of legacy news media, they have added to a corrosion of mass media's business models, they have diminished the influence of the media establishment. Consequently, while news media still matter, politicians and parties have gained in autonomy from broadcast mass media. But with that autonomy, politicians have increasingly become dependent on social media platforms. Here it is important to recognize that social media platforms are not technological extensions of previous media types or communication modes, that communication on social media platforms are not isolated to the specific platforms, and that social media are not just smart new ways for a monological transmission of information. They represent completely new ways of communicating and interacting among friends, families, citizens, voters, media, and politicians and parties.

As such, the argument is based on the conceptualisation of social media as a new form of social interaction, *mediated online interaction*, that takes place on media and technology platforms with distinct *media logics* of their own and which contributes to an increased *mediatization* of society and political culture.

Here *mediated online interaction* refers to Thompson's understanding of a new form of communication which involves the creation of "new forms of action and interaction, new kinds of social relationships, and new ways of relating to others and to oneself" (Thompson, 2020: 4). According to Thompson (1995, 2020), communication media can only be understood and analysed in their relationship to society, in the action and interaction which they make possible and create. Thompson distinguishes between four basic

types of interaction. The first form of communication is *face-to-face interaction*, in which takes an interactional and dialogical form that requires individuals to be co-present. The second form, *mediated interaction*, involves technology enabled communication of information or symbolic content to individuals, who are remote in space or time or both. It is dialogical in character, but with a narrow range of symbolic cues. The third form, *mediated quasi-interaction*, is monological in character and it is oriented towards an indefinite range of potential recipients: It involves the stretching of social relations across space and time, and it involves a certain narrowing of the range of symbolic clues. We know this form well from broadcast mass media. The new form of communication, which Thompson refers to as *mediated online interaction*, is the form of interaction that is created by computer-mediated communication. This new form of communication stretches social relations across space and time, it involves a certain narrowing of the range of symbolic clues, and finally, it is oriented towards a multiplicity of other recipients – it is many-to-many.

*Media logic* refers to Altheide and Snow's conceptualisation of media logic as a "form of communication; the process through which media present and transmit information" (Altheide & Snow, 1979: 11). The central thesis proposed by Altheide and Snow is that "*social reality is constituted, recognised, and celebrated with media*" (Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 12).

*Mediatization* then refers to a modern non-normative middle range sociological theory, which according to Danish media scholar Stig Hjarvard is understood as "a process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113). As for the mediatization of politics, the theory is simply that politics becomes mediatized when politics is dependent on and shaped by media and their logic.

For decades, the dominant form of media logic was the logic of mass media and broadcast news media, but with several dominating forms, the political communication culture change, and, where applicable, mediatization increases.

### **Framing Research**

Change is a challenge for research. Interdisciplinary dynamic research fields have many moving parts: Social media evolve constantly, political communication adapt, campaigns innovate, on a larger scale, institutional relations shift, society change. To understand the transformative processes of social media properly, the study of paradigmatic media change needs to be a central part of research. As it is, this is not new, as Swanson reminds us when he writes: "Political communication systems are dynamic, constantly

evolving, never settled. Just when we think we understand how it all works, things change” (Swanson, 2004).

Indeed, changes are manifest and continuous. In the efforts to meet the challenges of new transformative processes within political communication and electoral campaigning, researchers have resorted to well-established traditions, old communications theories and practices, tested and tried new methods to make sense of the continuous cascades of change, which were instantiated with the launch of the *world wide web* – or Web 1.0 – in the early 1990s, then later by *Web 2.0* and social media, and currently, the streamlining of social media platforms into a post-API age (Freelon, 2018a).

In these days, where the high hopes of digital optimism are turned into deterministic tech lash, it could be inferred, that societies have always been polarized and struggled with conflict, and that new forms of media and technologies always have been viewed as parts of the problems, if not even the root causes. But if history has taught us anything, then it is that people have always treated other people with disregard and contempt, news media have always been in crisis, and democracy has always been challenged. The origins and issues of social conflict, politics, distribution of wealth, or power and democracy remain the same, and no new forms of media or technologies will save us or society. They will not destroy it either. It seems that what will change because of new social media and technology are the conditions and possibilities for social interaction, realised as a shift in media power. Understood as the possibility to address social issues or change the political agenda, media power may be foundational for actual social change, but we need more research to explore how this new media power is exercised.

### **Politics and Media**

The first argument concerns *Politics and Media*. Here I argue two points. The first point is, that *conflict* is endemic to society. While media may enhance expressed opinions or even increase political polarisation among citizens, the root causes of conflict are foundational to society. To echo Manuel Castells, “[s]ocieties change through conflict and are managed through politics” (Castells, 2003). To view conflict as the root cause of societal change is not new, nor surprising. In John Locke’s (Locke, 1991; original 1689) treatises on government, conflict was deeply rooted in a tension between the individual born to be naturally free<sup>1</sup>, the commonwealth and government. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2015; original 1848) regarded conflict as “the history of

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<sup>1</sup> Locke writes (1991: 347): “‘Tis plain then, by the Practise of Governments themselves, as well as by the Law of right Reason, that a *Child is born a subject of no Country or Government*. He is under his Fathers Tuition and Authority, till he come to Age of Discretion; and then he is a Free-man, at Liberty what Government he will put himself under; what Body Politick he will unite himself to”.

class struggle”. Conflict can also be viewed as a societal condition, as German sociologist Georg Simmel (1966; original 1908) writes:

If every interaction among men is a sociation, conflict—after all one of the most vivid interactions, which, furthermore, cannot possibly be carried on by one individual alone—must certainly be considered as sociation. And in fact, *dissociating factors*?—hate, envy, need, desire—are the *causes* of conflict; it breaks out because of them. Conflict is thus designed to resolve divergent dualisms; it is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties.

Following Simmel on this point, the positive and negative aspects of conflict may be separated conceptually, but not empirically. Conflict then, and polar positions for that matter, I assume, is endemic to politics, and as such, following David Easton, the study of politics itself, is the study of the “authoritative allocation of values for a society” (Easton, 1953). In most states, conflicts and the fight for power have become institutionalized within a societal framework, and that power, at least in most western democracies, depends on the legitimacy of and trust in the political system, its institutions and environment, and not least, its political culture (Easton, 1953, 1965). Often, the primary concern of studies of political communication is exactly this fight for power, among the political elites, between the elites and the citizens, and of course its effects. The political fight for power is therefore not new, but fundamental also in modern democracy.

Adding to this, in tripartite representative parliamentary democracies there is a system of checks and balances, of control. Politicians, who are bestowed with privileges of power and the capacity to resolve conflict, must accept responsibility and accountability. They are formally obligated to explain their actions and justify policies truthfully. In most systems, there is a normative tradition, that those, who wield political power, should answer to the public to achieve political legitimacy. As such, political legitimacy stems from citizens, granted to politicians in the course of elections and referendums, and in between elections, through the support in the public opinion (Lippmann, 2015). The issue of legitimacy has been one of the most important domains of journalists, editors, and news media, which have acted not only as gatekeepers or reporters of political news, but also in the capacity of controlling and testing power. Though it sometimes seems different today, the news media still play an important role in politics in Denmark, adding different perspectives to the political fight for the limited resources in society. Media logic on an institutional level autonomy

The second point, I will make about politics is this, that we need to think of politics as a function of sociality and social interactions. Politics is as much a social phenomenon, as it is a matter of ideological or economic interests. The political affiliation and beliefs of the people we know, such as family members, friends, and colleagues, are important for how we view the world.

One persistent theoretical approach to social media platforms, or other forms of information and communication technologies, is that they are new practical *tools* employed by the political campaigns for winning elections (Jungherr, 2016; Koc-Michalska et al., 2014; Macafee et al., 2019). They are considered political marketing tools (Harris & Harrigan, 2015), or tools that target voters and predict their behaviour (M. Kosinski et al., 2013; Michal Kosinski et al., 2015). In the end, efficient mediation can be traced and parcelled out into measurable media effects. Often, in this view social media are regarded as something external to politics which have a quantifiable impact on politics, regardless of political system, media system, or that of social structures, local culture, or locative space. This form of research is usually based on explorations of the affordances offered by social media, where elements such as presence on social media or posting frequency are tangible metrics, which can be traced and compared. In some cases, this type of research is sensible, but it should be used as the starting point for research since it does not capture the impact of social media on culture and sociality.

But we know from empirical studies that politics is understood and constructed in social contexts. Studies of flow communication, such as the work of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (Lazarsfeld, et al., 1968), have made it clear that not everyone are equally interested in politics and that people look towards opinion leaders within their social spheres to be informed of politics before voting. In a Danish context, Bhatti and Hansen have studied the formative nature of families and friends for politics, and of voting as a social act. Among their findings are that for younger people the near family is very important for understanding politics, whereas when people get older their look towards their friends when it comes to politics (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012). Adding to this, a recent study by Bhatti, Fieldhouse, and Hansen in voter behaviour showed that a voting as shared social experience is important for electoral participation (Bhatti et al., 2018). Findings like these, should make us consider the importance of sociality when we discuss the use of social media platforms in politics and how we form our opinions.

### **Spaces and Places**

The second argument, *Spaces and Places*, concerns the locative *media space of politics*. Here the *media space of politics* refers to the phenomenon of politics being captured by media. In some theories of media and politics, the



political media space is regarded as closely related to the national media systems and country specific media culture. In other theories, however, the political media space is frequently regarded as detached from the physical local and national places. In the past decades, the latter view has gained in prominence within research and the increased popularity of social media platforms. My main point is, that while it makes good sense to situate politics in the media space, and even to think of the media logic in global terms, the political media space cannot be separated from the locative space of national politics, political communication culture, or societal institutions. In addition to this point, it seems that the use of any type of media is closely related to the locative space, from the national political arena to social interactions in small constituencies. The implication of this is, that we should ground research of the media space of politics situated in these locative spaces.

In existing theories on media and society, there is a deeply rooted tension between new technologies, abstract media space, and the physical national space. Often this tension leads to a detachment of political media space from the physical local and national space in politics. This detachment of the physical and media political spaces, Dahlgren argues, is caused by network technology, the Internet, and social media, since "... interactive media have introduced new media logics into the political domain, not least whereby "placeless" communicative spaces and user mobility stand in stark contrast to the rather fixed locational character of traditional politics" (Dahlgren, 2009: 53). This tension has been explored by media scholars for decades. To some, electronic media would lead to a collapse of space and time, such as Marshall McLuhan who in 1967 famously proposed that "'[t]ime' has ceased, 'space' has vanished. We now live in a global village ... a simultaneous happening". (McLuhan & Fiore, 2008: 63). To others, the detachment of media space from physical space would lead to a digital divide in global capitalism (Fuchs, 2016), and in politics, as argued by Zygmunt Bauman, "[g]eographical space remains the home of politics; while capital and information inhabit cyberspace, in which physical space is cancelled out or neutralized" (Bauman, 1999). Manuel Castells describes "the extreme social unevenness" as one of the effects of the digital divide, and "the networking logic and global reach of the new economy" (Castells, 2003). To Castells the physical local is the space of places, while the locative space of politics is the media, the space of flows (Castells, 2013).

Staying with Castells, who, in his seminal trilogy on the rise of the *Network Society*, noted that in a political culture in transition, politics is wholly captured in the space of the media (Castells, 2009b: 370), and "political actors themselves close the field of media politics by organizing political action primarily around the media" (Castells, 2009b: 373). The consequences of this

understanding of media space are quite dramatic, since according to Castells, “[o]utside the sphere of the media there is only political marginality” (Castells, 2009a: 370). Closely related to this position, that politics is captured in media space, is the idea, advanced among others by Nick Couldry, that “‘society’ can no longer be confined within national boundaries.” As such, Couldry writes that the Internet’s consequences for social theory are radical, and that the Internet’s “global connectivity creates a sense of the world as, for the first time in history, ‘a single social and cultural setting’” (Couldry, 2012).

These theoretical approaches are compelling, informative, and even operational, when discussing society framed in network technology, global media and political phenomena, like populism, counter cultures, transnational activism and social movements, or digital capitalism. But they also present researchers with problematic issues in terms of formal politics, since they do not deal adequately with politics bounded by the nation state, national legislation and election systems, national media systems, local culture and, not least, local languages. As such, I subscribe to the position advanced by Barbara Pfetsch, that political communication and culture take place in within the structural context of the political system and of the media system (Pfetsch, 2004). Consequently then, my argument is that research must be positioned within the context of the locative space defined by the boundaries of the nation state.

For decades, national mass media systems were the central public sphere where politicians and parties communicated their visions, ideas and ideology, and where citizens informed themselves of politics (Dahlberg, 2001; Dahlgren & Sparks, 1993; Habermas, 1992), and these media systems were so profoundly contextualized within the political system, political and institutional logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979), that it would make very little sense to think that one media system, out of exactly that context, could be replaced by another (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Adding to the entanglement of the media system with the political system, mass media increasingly led to the mediatization of politics, including both personalization and professionalization of politics, and at the turn of the millennium, Mazzoleni & Schulz observed that “more than ever, politics cannot exist without communication” (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999: 250). Even given massive structural changes, increased global competition, and commercialization of legacy media, existing types of national media systems still matter for politics (Kaufmann & Jeandesboz, 2017; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011).

Conversely, national election systems shape the use of social media. Just think of the difference between the personal competitive horseracing elections and open list multiparty proportional elections. National elections

and legislation, as well as political logic and communication culture, may not only be shaping how social media platforms through practical use, but they also constrain the use of social media in a variety of ways. Even though platforms may seem to offer global affordances to the users, or universal media logics, actual use is not always global or universal.

In a recent ethnographic study of how people use social media in nine different locations around the world, one of the many interesting findings was that it was content, rather than platforms, that mattered to users, and that “[c]ontent manifests and transforms local relationships and issues” (Miller et al., 2016). What this suggests then, is that media logic, i.e., how media platforms operate and which affordances they offer users, may be considered a global and fixed entity of social media platform, whereas content or information could be uniquely local and flexible.

Sometimes social media platforms’ logics are shaped by specific societal structures, cultural values and norms, as was the case in 2016, when journalist and author Tom Egeland was locked out of Facebook for posting a picture of the young Kim Phuc, fleeing naked from napalm bombs in the Vietnam war (Hellum, 2016). As a reaction to the exclusion, Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* ran a campaign, #dearmark. In this, the editor in chief, Espen Eigil Hansen, accused Facebook of censorship and called for Mark Zuckerberg to change the platforms rules on nudity, and distinguish between child pornography and documentary photographs, so that important information, however unpleasant, could be part of a larger democratic conversation (Hansen, 2016). After the newspaper got the support of Norway’s prime minister, Erna Solberg, who posted the picture on her Facebook page and had it deleted by Facebook (Solberg, 2016), the platform finally caved. Lamenting the incident, referring to the challenges of screening of large numbers of posts as the cause of the controversy, Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg wrote “... we intend to do better. We are committed to listening to our community and evolving” (Dagenborg, 2016).

More frequently, media logics and locative platform usage are shaped by national and international laws and regulations of platforms, as well as agreements between public institutions and platforms. Among the major examples in an European context are the German legislation on online hate speech, the Network Enforcement Act, in German *Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz* (*Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz*, 2017), commonly referred to as #NetzDG, the recent adoption of the General Data Protection Regulation (Purtova, 2018; General Data Protection Regulation, 2016), also known as GDPR, for protecting citizens’ personal data in the European Union, or the voluntary Code of conduct on countering illegal hate

speech online (European Commission, 2016) between the European Union and the platforms Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube on how to handle hate speech on social media platforms operating in the European Union. By recognizing that politics is not isolated from the rest of society, it becomes clear that national or cross-national politics shape the conditions under which social media platforms exist and operate (Mazzoleni, 2017). Social media platforms may be global in their construction, but they have tremendous local impact in elections or in discussion politics in everyday life.

Adding to this, to understand the impact of social media on everyday politics within a given political entity, that is, the impact on culture, forms of campaigning, media systems, and eventually institutions like politics, power, and democracy, we need to explore the *hybrid dynamics* of social media as a collective media space, as a network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015a). I will investigate how social media platforms influence the media ecology and the political culture, and not just as short term effects of a single medium's impact on society (Hepp et al., 2010; Meyerowitz, 1994). Although it is common - and often very sensible - to explore the use of a single platform, it tends to cloud the use in a wider context, but it also reduces the importance of relational connectivity through multiple media platforms.

In the past years, a wide variety of research have studied use-case scenarios of media use across platforms, or rather ensembles of media types, such as a media matrix (Dahlgren, 2009), media manifold (Couldry, 2016), polymedia (Madianou & Miller, 2013), or media multiplexity (Haythornthwaite, 2002, 2005; Miczo et al., 2011). As researchers, we should recognize that while social media platforms maybe be in competition, their users often use several platforms to connect and interact with others. Sometimes these others may be far apart, but often they are in very close proximity since they belong to the same social spheres.

### **Americana**

In the final argument, *Americana*, I explore the origins of research into social media and politics. A substantial part of the research into social media and politics is of American origin. While the quality of American research is generally thought to be of high quality, the contextual backdrop is very different from the European and Danish in terms of the specific political systems, political communication cultures, and the national media systems, as well as the institutional compositions. The argument here is not that we should discard American research. Quite the contrary. It is informative of technical and operational aspects of social media, in effect the media logics. the tactics and strategies used by politicians and parties in the American arena, or even the impact of social media platforms on the electoral outcome

in the United States. It contributes significantly to our ontological and epistemological knowledge, as well as to specific digital methods used to explore the field. We have much to learn from American research. The main point of the argument is then, that we need to ground research in context of national politics and media systems, e.g., the Danish arena, or at within shared supranational arenas, such as the Nordic countries or the European Union, if we wish to understand the influence and importance of social media in politics within the specific cultures and systems.

In this last part of the introduction to the theoretical perspectives, which have informed my work, it is important to recognize the role American culture, American politics and America-based research has played in how we view the world. Social media platforms are largely products of American ingenuity and innovation of media and technology. Platforms are actively shaped by the imagination and resourcefulness found in places like Silicon Valley. Like any other field, the study of social media platforms in politics has its pivotal moments. Curiously, most of these transitory moments in political communication are innovative uses of media that have originated in American politics. Starting in the 1930s, in the golden age of the radio, Roosevelt used radio for more than a decade to broadcast his fireside chats to the American people. In 1960, the televised debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon seemed to be a deciding factor in the election of the American president. For digital and social media, the major turning point came in 2008, when Barack Obama won the election. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, Silicon Valley have shaped social media platforms, now these platforms shape us, as individuals and as societies.

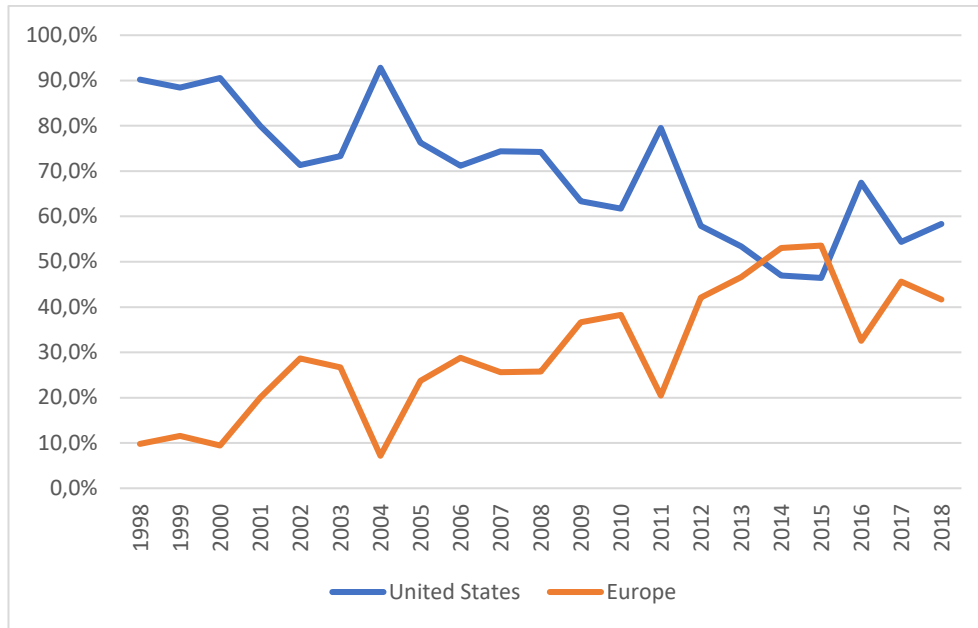
In the United States, freedom of speech is paramount, and so too is the American (self)regulatory model, which to a large extent matches the liberal media market, with its extensive commercialization and fierce competition, meant to serve the American public. This is not new. In 1983, Ithiel de Sola Pool wrote the book, *Technologies of Freedom*, in which he argues that free speech is a worldwide problem, and then he continues by assessing that what “is true for the United States is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for all free nations. ... they face the same prospect of either freeing up their electronic media or else finding their major means of communication slipping back under political control” (Pool, 1983). Today, as possible ways of regulating the Internet and social media platforms are discussed, that social media platforms should be free of government regulation is still the American baseline argument.

In a comparative analysis of the political blogospheres in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, Ki Deuk Hyun observes the distinctive attitudes and uses of new media as communicative tools in political

communication, as well as the similarities and differences between the representative model of democracy and political culture in the German political system compared to the more participatory cultures and modes of political participation within the political system of the United States. Hyun notes that the debates surrounding the idea of “digital democracy” in Germany and the United States are fundamentally different. In Germany, political organizations understood as institutional linkages to competing social groups, seems far more important than the citizens’ direct participation in the political process. In the United States, Hyun describes how the debate is conversely focused on “the potential of new media technology to reinvigorate and implement direct democracy”, and the very idea of electronic democracy is considered to be an “American exception” (Hyun, 2012).

It seems almost needless to say, but American political communication culture is incredibly competitive and highly personalized, and apart from reflecting the horseracing style of American elections, it mirrors the strong cultural values and practices found in American society. Swanson and Mancini use the term *Americanization* to refer to the new types, elements and processes of election campaigns or political communication, and the professional activities related to them, since these were first developed in the United States and are now being applied and adapted in other countries. According to Swanson and Mancini, we should not understand this as a normative assessment of American political communication culture, but rather as a reflection of the modernization of campaigning and political communication.

Similarly, American research traditions are based on the concrete functional use of media as intermediary tools and communication as acts of mediation, which can be inserted into any campaign, plug and play, and understood in terms of short range theories of media effects (e.g. strong media effects, minimal effects, or transactional media effects), in conceptual frameworks of two-step communication or agenda-setting, rather than on middle-range theories of institutional and societal change. The American traditions have dominated the mainstream research literature on the influence of mass media like newspapers, radio and television on the electoral campaigns and political communication. Among the consequences is that the Americanization of the political field, including how politicians and parties replicate the use of technology, techniques, and tactics from successful American election campaigns, have been conflated with an institutional perspective on electoral politics emanating from the American political system.



*Total Research Output: The United States versus Europe. N = 5.200. Trend lines in percentages.*

Not surprisingly, most of the research into the use of social media in politics is American too. Based on research output on social media and politics<sup>2</sup>, 5.200 publications in total, in the past twenty years, researchers in the United States have supplied 74,6 percent of the publications, whereas researchers from Europe only delivered 25,4 percent of the research. Although research has become more evenly distributed in recent years, this is mainly due to a decline in the American research output, not an increase in the European output. American scholars have done extensive work on how social media platforms are used in American politics and what the effects are in the many American elections, which by the way of election systems are horserace competitions between few candidates. Most of the time, the candidates standing in elections represent one of the two major parties in American politics, the Democratic Party or Republican Party. In one sense, this term, *Americanization*, could be applied to the research emanating from the United States. Not as a qualitative marker, because much of the American research is of world class quality, profound, and highly informative, but as a gentle reminder, that we need to understand that American research reflects a different kind of political system, political communication, and an altogether different society. Not necessarily bad, simply different. In another sense, it

<sup>2</sup> In measuring the total research output, I queried the EBSCO Host database using the search terms “facebook” OR “twitter” OR “instagram” OR “internet” OR “social media” AND “politic\*” OR “politik\*” for research on social media and politics for the years 1998 to 2018. The research output includes all publications, articles, books, conference contributions, etc., and it should be considered indicative, rather than absolute.

could be seen as a marker, reflecting deep societal change. In a call for more precision in discussions about Americanization, Negerine and Papathanassopoulos (1996) called for more research on how local political institutions and cultures were affected by the American style campaigns.

Researchers may have discovered that the new digital and social media platforms lead to new practices when they have made comparisons of the short-term media effects of the use of social media platforms in electoral campaigns. European research literature is often comparative in nature, but the underlying narrative is still framing elections as horseracing games and personalized campaigns. The perspective is lopsided. The use of social media platforms differs from system to system, from country to country, from context to context. Often, we lack knowledge of either context, our own and more often of the factors that shape the American. It seems that Nick Anstead (2017) was right, when he noted that “our understanding of non-US contexts remains patchy” when we explore campaigns. Anstead argues that the institutional context of politics is important, since “data-driven politics ... is about more than technology”, and when we analyse campaigning, we should not mistake technologically intensive practices for technologically defined practices and how they are understood as they are shaped by political contexts.

While this may sound trivial, researchers engaged in studies of sociocultural systems often seem to be oblivious to cultural or political differences. In a sense, this is not surprising. Often researchers focus on the universal affordances, mechanisms, or logics offered by social media platforms as sociotechnical systems and how they affect people. Sometimes they do not even care about how people are affected, but only about the system. Even in comparative studies between countries, the effects of the use of social media in political communication and campaigning are studied with little regard of the context, such as the composition of the election system(s) in focus, the structure of inter- and intra-party competition, national rules and regulation of campaigning, the national media system, and not least, the national political culture.

With this in mind, we need to study the American research, explore their methods, and learn from them, but never assume it is possible to transpose a system or knowledge without making the necessary adaptations would be wrong. So, what we do know, is this: To understand the impact of social media on politics in a society like the Danish, we need to contextualize our research to match the institutional and societal framework. Hence, it is impossible to make any larger statements about the nature of the political communication on social media platforms used in Danish politics without



taking into consideration the Danish election system, the structure of party competition, regulation of campaigning, national media system, and the national political culture. I will return to a discussion of all these aspects below.

### **Social Media, Media Logics, and Mediatization**

In the short history of social media, many different definitions of what social media are and how they work have surfaced. Common to most of them are that on social media platforms content is user generated, unmediated, and disseminated without any external control. Unlike the unidirectional communication offered by mass media, communication on social media is multidirectional, and users can create, share, and interact with content, as well as participate in networked communication with one or more users, as well as in groups on social media and even beyond. Central to most definitions of the communication that takes place on social media is the core technological foundation of *Web 2.0*. In 2005, Tim O'Reilly summarized these core capabilities of social networking platforms as scalable web services, not software, which controlled unique data and harnessed collective intelligence. Companies should “leverage customer-self service and algorithmic data management to reach out to the entire web, to the edges and not just the center”, but also trust users as co-developers. Finally, software should be above the level of a single device, and adding to this, user interfaces, development models, and business models should be lightweight (O'Reilly, 2005, 2012).

A widely used definition of social media has been offered by Kaplan and Haenlein, who described social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Along with their definition of social media, Kaplan and Haenlein constructed a comprehensive classification of six different types of social media, ranging from *collaborative projects*, *blogs*, *content communities*, *social networking sites*, to *virtual game worlds*, and *virtual social worlds*.

This classification may have been an appropriate typology at the time, but as social media have evolved into versatile platforms, e.g., mobile gadgets and platforms, today, it almost seems reductive. These different types of social media have all been used for political communication, but in a larger political context, *social network sites* have attracted most interest, mainly because of the prominence of sites like Facebook and Twitter. As for a more specific definition of social network sites, the most pervasive version was supplied in 2007 by Boyd and Ellison (2007) in their seminal paper, *Social Network Sites*:

*Definition, History, and Scholarship*, in which social network sites were defined as

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

Among the notable examples of early social networking sites were *Friendster*, *Cyworld*, *MySpace*, *Bebo*, and *Facebook*. Six years later, under the impression of dramatic changes in the social and technical landscape of social network sites, in a new article Ellison and Boyd revisited their definition and argued that the “technical affordances that define a social network site have become increasingly fluid”, and accordingly revised their definition of social network sites to reflect these changes. Now the updated definition of social network sites read:

A social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (Ellison & Boyd, 2013).

While Kaplan and Haenlein’s definition of social media and Boyd and Ellison’s of social network sites are highly informative and instructive, the *social* is basically confined to the technological dimensions of social media. Boyd and Ellison do address platforms with the *socio-technical contexts*, *socio-technical dynamics*, or *socio-technical systems*, but the terms remain vaguely defined as internalizations of how actors’ relations are constructed, or as to how communication is performed with network technology. They offer no wider analysis of social media platforms’ interplay with other media types or external technologies, nor do they consider social media platforms as enterprise social media platforms, or how social media platforms operate within a wider context of political institutions, communications culture, and society at large.

The detachment of the social as something distinctly different going on in a digital universe somewhere else or not at all. As such, the use of the terms, the *socio-technical* or the *socio-cultural*, reflect that organizations, software, or communication technologies are constructed by the use of social systems

and technical systems, in which there is “a recursive shaping of abstract social constructs and a technical infrastructure that includes technology’s materiality and people’s localized responses to it” (Leonardi, 2012).

One of the early critical responses to this definition of social networking sites, David Beer thought that separating “out online from offline, even if we think of them as ‘entwined’, seems to take us away from understanding these technologies as mundane and as a defining and integral part of how people live” (Beer, 2008). Correspondingly, Michael L. Kent thought of researching social media as being *trivial*. In his view, research would become too reductive and detached from societal problems, as researchers studied tweets and not publics, and counted blog post instead of finding solutions to problems. Kent wrote, that the “future of social media and public relations is a future of stepping past the technologies as marketing and advertising tools and embracing them as tools capable of solving problems and engaging publics in real-world issues” (Kent, 2010). Similarly, José van Dijck and Thomas Poell argue that we should try to understand these real-world issues, along with other complex dynamics, “not just as they unfold within the boundaries of social media platforms proper, but in their confrontations with different logics dominating other institutional contexts”, adding that we need a “theoretical model that helps understand how all elements work interdependently in creating a coherent fabric, and also helps explain how this social media logic mixes with (offline) institutional logics” (José van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Adding to the criticism of previous definitions of social media and social networking sites, Carr and Hayes found them to be too technocentric and inductive, and, by approaching social media grounded in contemporary technological affordances, research would fail to capture what makes “social media unique both as a technology and as a construct”. By doing so, research would be obscured and constrained to theory of contemporary “technologies, services, and practices”. Instead, they argued, social media should be regarded as “disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users”, and so researchers, developing theories and models of social media, should allow the communicative element to guide the theory or model, rather than the individual medium. Adding to this, they suggested that since technologies would change more “rapidly than the fundamental nature of human communication”, a shift in research to a broader focus on theories of communication would ensure more robust contributions over time and regardless of individual social media (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

In exploring the legal and regulatory challenges which social media pose for the external governance of social media, Obar and Wildman summarized social media services as Web 2.0 Internet-based applications, where content is user-generated by individuals or groups, who have created user-specific profiles, and where social media connect profiles to other profiles or groups, thus developing online social networks. They found that there were two main challenges in defining social media. First, the speed at which technology is expanding and evolving, makes it difficult to define clear-cut boundaries of social media. Secondly, social media facilitate forms of communication which are like those enabled by other technologies. Since social media serve as the foundation for new businesses, organizing social relationships, and offer critical connections between political candidates and their supporters, they eventually impact the “design and delivery of government”, Obar and Wildman makes government response for unavoidable (Obar & Wildman, 2015).

For the purpose of this thesis, I regard Kaplan and Haenlein as well as Boyd and Ellison’s definitions as conceptual starting points for further explorations of how social media work as sociotechnical platforms. In moving forward, I will explore some of the central sociotechnical definitions, like users, user generated content, interactivity and participation, as parts of the logic of social media platforms.

### **Platforms and Infrastructure**

The last point concerns the shift in research and theoretical approaches regarding networks and platforms. In the past decades, there has been a move from understanding social media in terms of network cultures and technologies to a conceptualization of social media as platforms. The use of the term platform is not new within the field of social media or computing. In an introduction to the research field of platform studies, Bogost and Montfort (2007) summarized the platform concept this way:

The hardware and software framework that supports other programs is referred to in computing as a platform. A platform in its purest form is an abstraction, simply a standard or specification. To be used by people and to take part in our culture directly, a platform must manifest itself materially.

In 2005, Tim O’Reilly used the terms platform and Web 2.0 to describe the dimensions of technical configurations of social networks. (O’Reilly, 2005). Likewise, Kaplan and Haenlein thought of Web 2.0 as the “platform for the evolution of Social Media” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In their update of their definition of social network sites, Ellison and Boyd redefine social

network sites as networked communication platforms (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Conceptually, it seems we have moved from theories of the *Network Society* (Castells, 2009a) to trying to understand connectivity in the Platform Society (Jose van Dijck, 2013; José van Dijck et al., 2018), and from networked capitalism (Benkler, 2006) to platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2016).

Throughout this thesis, I use the term *social media platforms* as a collective catch all phrase to describe social media in general, as new media forms used for political communication. These new media forms are based on digital technology, hardware and software, which shapes media use, political communication and participation, and, in a wider sense, society (and vice versa). This then includes the various subtypes of – often web based – social media, e.g., social networking sites or blogs, but I also include *mobile instant messaging services*, known as MIMS, like *WhatsApp*, *Facebook Messenger*, and *Snapchat*, as a social media subtype, though this has been contested. I do, however, use the term social media platforms cautiously, and here is why:

In the wake of mergers between YouTube and Google in the late 2000s, a wider transformation from social networking sites, which had been universally open with content accessible and sharable, to more closed technical platforms, where access to the platforms data required platform approval, regulation of access to platform infrastructure and data, increased control of how interaction with data should be handled and shared, all for the purpose of making the platforms economically viable.

### **Platforms**

Initially, according to Tarleton Gillespie (2010) the term *platformization* was used metaphorically to capture the transformative process in its computational meaning, but rapidly the use of *platforms* became a portmanteau for a wide range of loosely related concepts (Gillespie, 2017). Adding to this, the platform metaphor implies that users are on the same level with equal access to and use of different types of social media. This is clearly not the case. Politicians, parties, and media professionals use social media platforms very differently from ordinary users (i.e., citizens) of social media. Indeed, even among politicians and parties, access to platforms differ significantly (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018), and notably professionals access to platforms have been commodified by the platform companies (Stevens & Dewan, 2018), though some of the past practices may be waning (Ingram, 2018).

Anne Helmond (2015) offers a different take on the concept of platformization. Helmond argues that the process of platformization “rests on the dual logic of social media platforms’ expansion into the rest of the web

and, simultaneously, their drive to make external web and app data platform ready”. According to Helmond, this double logic is operationalized through APIs and social plugins, which connect the platforms infrastructure to support its economic aims.

Secondly, the use of *platforms* often reveals a certain analytical and discursive approach to social media. Today, the term is a central concept in Actor Network Theory, but the term is also used more loosely within digital and technological materiality, often realised as new forms of techno-cultural constructs and socioeconomic structures closely related to the platforms’ wider roles in the political economy and platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2016), and that of new media technologies within society. Obviously, in this sense, social media platforms companies like Facebook, Google, or Microsoft are part of that discussion, but the discussion on the platform economy also includes streaming services like Netflix, HBO, or Disney, services like Amazon, Airbnb, Uber, or Mechanical Turk which all present societies with a host of problematic issues. Here it is used to describe a process by which the major tech companies are *reconfiguring the production, distribution, and monetization of cultural products and services*, or what we understand as the logics of platforms, and how this process impacts cultural industries and communal practices. If platformization is defined as such, David Nieborg and Thomas Poell argue that they signify “the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

### **Infrastructures**

Finally, recently a new layer of *infrastructuralization* of platforms has been added to the discussion of the platformization of society. Basically, infrastructuralization contributes to the platformization by expanding the understanding of relationships between platform components, e.g. users, on platforms, and between platforms as well (Plantin et al., 2018). The shift is a move from a nodal focus to a relational perspective, in effect including ties between nodes, which reveals how “influential digital platforms constitute social and material infrastructures at the user level” (Plantin & Punathambekar, 2018).

Broadly speaking, platform companies now not only seek to control the access to platforms through their own APIs, but also through third-party data harvest and sharing of user activity on the open web, i.e. the *World Wide Web*, or – indeed – on *Darknets*, i.e. encrypted Internet networks allowing for anonymous hosting and communication (Gehl & McKelvey, 2018). The infrastructure perspective is interesting, since it is no longer the user, as a

nodal point within a specific space of the platform, that “is the sole focus anymore, but rather the relational data that conjoins users, nonusers, objects, locations, and temporalities” (Langlois & Elmer, 2018).

This is no, by any standard, a trivial discussion. It goes to the heart of ownership and regulation of platforms, and, subsequently, to who controls the communication on and in between platforms, and, as such, it enhances the complex relationships between of platforms. Both transcends individual platform logics, but this plays into a broader understanding of network media logic. In terms of this thesis, this has two implications. First, it adds to platform power as it strengthens the long-term viability of platforms. This process reinforces the logic of individual platforms, and as such, it adds more pressure to the subjection and dependency of politicians and parties to platforms. Secondly, in adapting network media logic it becomes clear, that politicians need to be present on multiple platforms, partly to connect with users across platforms, partly to be able to control the political narrative when it moves from platform to platform. In this, the use of platformization marks the transition from a network society based on connectivity to a different social and cultural construction of society based on of platform power. The platform (José van Dijck et al., 2018), forms the nexus between the logic of platforms and to grasp a more narrow understanding for media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube, social media logics (José van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

### **Media Logics and Mediatization**

In this thesis, social media platforms are defined as new digital media forms based on Internet technology, hardware and software. Social media platforms are then primarily realised as media forms, which are operated in accordance with institutional and conceptual logics. Here this realisation is understood in its entirety as *social media logic*, which has become a dominating institutional logic in the past decades. Social media platforms and their logics are part of a dual process. On one hand social media logic structure media use, e.g., mediation, social interactions, and eventually the political communication culture, and on the other hand, social media logic is also shaped and can be regulated by other institutions. The long-term result of this process is understood as a dimension which adds to the mediatization of politics.

In concrete terms, I argue that social media platforms, including the processes of social media logic and mediatization, should be studied within a context specific political communication culture, that includes the specific election system, the structure of candidate and party competition, the overall regulation of political communication and campaigning, the national political culture, and the national media system. This political communication culture

should not be understood as a theoretical construct, but as Barbara Pfetsch (2004) has defined it, as the “empirical observable orientations of actors in the system of production of political messages toward specific objects of political communication, which determine the manner in which political actors and media access communicate in relation to the common political public”.

Research can then be structured to explore different aspects of the political communication culture, e.g., how politicians use of social media platforms for different forms of mediation, to the extent mediation or how political communication culture becomes mediatized. To clarify, the concept of mediation refers to the use of a medium for communication and interaction. As such, the study of mediation looks for media’s impact on specific communicative effects or practice. To study short-range media effects, such as agenda-setting, only mediation is needed, or as Hjarvard (2014) argues, “the process of mediation itself does not alter the relationship between media, culture, and society”.

Since media logic is a central concept in this thesis, part of Altheide and Snow’s argument is that “a *medium* is any social or technological procedure or device that is used for the selection, transmission, and reception of information” (Altheide & Snow, 1979: 11). Obviously, media and media logic are at the centre of mediatization too. As Winfried Schulz has observed, media play central roles in a variety of the processes of social change (W. Schulz, 2004). Schulz have defined these typological roles as extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation. Much like McLuhan, Schulz regards media and media technologies as extension of the natural limits of human communication capacities in terms of space, time, and expressiveness. As for substitution, Schulz argues that media “partly or completely substitute social activities and social institutions and thus change their character”. Substitution then could mean the media replacement of humans, materials of non-media form, or indeed, the replacement of old media by new media, e.g., by social media platforms. The third process of social change, Schulz calls amalgamation. In this process, media not only extend or substitute non-media or media activities, but they also merge. The final process of social change is accommodation, refers to the fact that media exist, and thus induces social change. In concrete terms, media provide jobs and income for people, and contribute considerably to the economy. As such, Schulz notes, that “various economic actors have to accommodate to the way the media operate”. Among those actors are politicians and political parties, who adapt to the media logic, that is to the production routines, styles, and formats, as well as the modes of political action and of political processes change which the media enable.



Adding to these types of social processes invoked by media, Schulz reminds us, that all media perform three basic functions, a relay function, a semiotic function, and an economic function, which are the preconditions for communication to succeed. Communication is, by definition, only successful if commonness arises between sender and recipient. Hence, commonness is the result of transferring meaning through signs. Schulz argues, that “the technological, semiotic, and economic characteristics of communication result in dependencies, constraints and exaggerations that constitute the core meaning of mediatization”. In a sense, media technology has become the means of production of cultural meaning.

### **Media Logic**

In 1979, Altheide and Snow published their theory of *media logic* (1979)

has been of fundamental interest for researchers working with media, politics, technology, and institutions.

Media logic has had an impact as a stand-alone short range theory, but it has also inspired numerous related but more specific theories on mass media. In 2014, Meyen, Thieroff, & Strenger (2014) outlined a *mass media logic*, and Kent Asp (2014) has proposed a *news media logic*, and in past decade, there has been a stream of theories related to research in the Internet and digital communication, platforms, and technologies, such as Andrew Chadwick’s *network logic* (2006) and *hybrid media logic* (2013), Richard Rogers has suggested that there should be a *reverse media logic* integrated into *search engine logic* (R. Rogers, 2006), Cushion and Thomas have proposed that a certain *public logic* should be accounted for (Cushion & Thomas, 2018), and more importantly for this thesis, José van Dijck and Thomas Poell (2013) have contributed with the concept of *social media logic*, Klinger and Svensson (2015a) have argued for a *network media logic*, and Langlois and Elmer (2013) have explored a layered and multi-dimensional *corporate social media logic*. Media logic has also become integrated into other theoretical constructions of media and society, like *mediatization*.

In general terms, Altheide and Snow summarized media logic as a

form of communication; the process through which media present and transmit information. Elements of this form include the various media and the formats used by these media. Format consists, in part, of how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication (Altheide & Snow, 1979: 11).

Altheide and Snow argued that media form is not structure, but “a processual framework through which social action occurs. Media logic constitutes such a form”. In their framework, information gets wrapped and communicated with varying degrees of the four different dimensions, the organization of material, the presentational style, behaviour, and the grammar of communication. Clarifying this, Altheide and Snow argued that a *medium* is “any social form or technological procedure or device that is used for the selection, transmission, and reception of information”. In conceptualizing what a medium is, Altheide and Snow’s main focus may have been on modern mass media, like newspapers, radio and television, but the scope of their work also included a variety of different media types, such as ritualized social elements like fashion, dance, clocks and calendars. Altheide (2004) later added, that the concept of media logic refers to the “assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium”. In a wider sense, Altheide and Snow claimed that “*social reality is constituted, recognized, and celebrated with media*” (Altheide & Snow, 1979: 12).

In their understanding of modern media, Altheide and Snow proposed that communication technology carries a connotation of rationality, and that this “rational character of media logic” leads to dependability among audiences, who want information that is relevant to their desires. This characteristic is then consistent with the “modern scientific manner in which contemporary society operates”. At the same time, it is recognized that there is more than a scientific rational logic to modern media. The style of the technology used may promote affective response, as in entertainment. Combining rational logic with entertainment yields a new form of communication, which Altheide and Snow claim is unique to modern urban society.

It could be argued, that a one of the major contributions of media logic as a theory is that it combines a conceptualization of mediation, understood as how communication function and is operationalized, but at the same time it provides the framework to describe the interplay between media, technology, culture and society in general. Or in other words, media logic can be conceived as a dual exchange mechanism, which captures internal operations of media, or mediation, as well as its external influence on social interaction, and the long-term consequences and changes that occur because the process of media logic are then realized as mediatization. These changes can be minor and only affect few individuals or small groups, such as the behaviour of individual political candidates, or they have major institutional impact, influencing societal processes, like political campaigning and electioneering.

Approaching media logic from an institutional perspective is central for understanding the importance of the theory of media logic. Changes in media

logic are not only constitutive of how individual actors' communicate or structure their practices, but as they are subjected to the specific formats or production routines of any medium, media become institutionalized and thus becomes "the dominant force to which other institutions conform" (Altheide & Snow, 1979: 15). Bending towards this dominating force, other forms of logic are subjected to the organizational and institutional forms of media logic. Yet at the same time Hallin and Mancini (2004) remark, that it is the dynamics that enhance differentiation between logics. In broadcast news media, research have shown that the subjection of other forms of logics can be expressed in the way issues and stories are organized, presented, and communicated within those logics, and increase the dominating force of media logic by professionalizing critical journalism as well as commercializing the news media production.

Correspondingly, in exploring the news media as a political institution, Timothy E. Cook do not consider the rules and procedures that constitute institutions as static, but rather as institutionalized practices, as *the* way to get things done, that "endure over time and extend over space, and are widely recognized both within the organizations that constitute the institutions as well as from outside as all performing similar jobs that occupy a central place in the society and polity". Broadly speaking, journalistic professionalism and commercialization of the news media are not structured by formal rules or by personal norms or values, but performed routinely as daily work rituals, established as objectivity, accuracy, veracity, factuality and journalistic ethics, which are embedded in media culture as news values. Following Cook's argument, "institutions are social patterns of behavior identifiable across the organizations that are generally seen within a society to preside over particular social sphere" (Cook, 1998). Conceiving social patterns as organizational and institutional forms is important, partly because it allows research to position media logics within a larger framework of institutional logics, and partly because media logics allows researchers to explorer how media practices become social and cultural interactions.

In an institutional perspective, media logic is contextualized within a broader framework of institutional logic, in order to understand how it influences and reconfigures the social and cultural construction of society (Alford & Friedland, 1985; Amenta & Ramsey, 2010; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, 2012). Within this framework of institutional logic each institution of society, in this case media logic, is perceived to have a central logic that constrains the means and ends of individual behaviour, is constitutive of individuals, organizations, and society, but also provides sources of agency and change (Friedland & Alford, 2012). Friedland and Alford argued that central logics, e.g. politics, law, religion, or media, should be viewed as practices and symbolic

constructions, which “have social functions and are defended by political organized interests” (Alford & Friedland, 1985; Friedland & Alford, 1991). Within the order of this institutional logic, the position each institutional logic is constantly being contested and renegotiated to determine its relationship with other institutional logics. Today, it is hard to imagine how other forms of institutional logics, like political or religious logic, could be defended or renegotiated without the presence of some form of media. It could be argued that some forms of media need an extra media dimension to be able to defend its position within the institutional order.

The institutional perspective of media logic is arguably the most important, but it is however, not the only perspective. Scholars have worked with various forms of media logic from an operational or conceptual viewpoint, rather than an institutional one. The conceptual viewpoint is often explored empirically in most variants of media logic related to the use of the Internet and social media in politics, such as in *Networked Logic* (Chadwick, 2006), in *Hybrid Media Logic* (Chadwick, 2013), and in *Network Media Logic* (Klinger & Svensson, 2015a, 2015a, 2018) to name a few.

In *Rethinking the Logics: A Conceptual Framework for the Mediatization of Politics* (Landerer, 2013), Nino Landerer suggested that media logic as a conceptual framework for the mediatization of politics should integrate economic and technological progress. The aim is first to advance the theoretical debate to an operationalized, which secondly, is grounded in a coherent conceptual framework based on the last two dimensions of Strömbäck’s four-dimensional model (Strömbäck, 2008a), that would allow for analysis of media content and political actors. Finally, Landerer argued that although mediatization of politics is primarily a media-related process, it cannot be understood without a larger societal context in “the process of being integrated technologically, economically, and culturally”.

### **Social Media Logic**

In recent years, scholars have sought to research social media platforms as platforms with logics of their own, which operate within a complex system of logics. In fusing previous definitions of social media with institutional and conceptual forms of media logics, *social media logic* adds new layers of perspectives to research into social media and politics. The approach is important social media platforms are recognised as a new form of mediated communication which allowed social media to be researched on their own terms, but also in their own rights as parts of larger institutional contexts and complex media systems. This duality of a separate media logic, but with a connection to other forms of logic as well as social interaction has been emblematic of past research.

In Patrick Wikström and Hanna-Kaisa Ellonen’s exploration the impact of social media on print media companies’ online business models from 2012, the term social media logic was used not only to describe the conceptual features of social media, but also to highlight the institutional competition between different types of logics, business logic, economic logic, and social media logic (Wikström & Ellonen, 2012). In 2013, Ganaele Langlois and Greg Elmer researched how to explore new forms of power on social media platforms, where semantic information was regarded as *digital objects*, i.e., content embedded with links, video, photos, images and more, in multi-dimensional layers of *thick data* (as opposed to *big data*) representing different forms of logic, i.e., a technical logic, a media logic, and a logic of the political economy of the platform. Following this finding, information could not only be articulated within a specific layer of logic, but it could also be articulated between the layers of logic. In this process of double articulation of code and politics, researchers studied how information was being processed and rendered, rather than just the content. Langlois and Elmer argued that social media platforms are not just semantic communication platforms, but platforms that “promote the patterning of communication through media objects, which involves recording not only what is being said but, more broadly, the act of communication itself” (Langlois & Elmer, 2013).

The same year, Thomas Poell and José van Dijck presented their paper *Understanding Social Media Logic* (2013), in which they argued that social media platforms had a specific media logic of their own. As a part of their argument, Poell and José van Dijck claimed that not only did social media platforms affect the operational and institutional power balance of existing media systems, the logic of social media platforms was increasingly getting entangled with other forms of media logics, but also with other forms of institutional logics within culture and politics. Using a Dutch case among youths, which attracted substantial news media attention as the backdrop for a highly mediated societal conflict, Poell and van Dijck showed how social media have significant social functions, but also how different media discourses were engaged and used to defend the interests of these logics.

In terms of the institutional perspective, Poell and van Dijck approach social media logics as a non-exhaustive grammatical form, in which they identify four central elements — programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication — as part of the syntax that bind social media logic together. These conceptual elements, they argue, “are pivotal in understanding how in a networked society, social interaction is mediated by an intricate dynamic of mass media, social media platforms, and offline institutional processes”. As such, social media logics are used to understand the sociotechnical constructs

conceptually, but also that increasingly, social media platforms have become meaningful in social life outside of platforms. Social media logics are, e.g., by disseminating platform content or interactional metrics, deeply entangled with mass media logic. While these forms of media logic are different in their cultural form, and have competing commercial and advertising practices, the dynamics of their conceptual and institutional relationships are not only processes of changing relations between different types of logic, or replacing one form of media logic with another, but also a process wherein different media logics are reinforcing each other. During this process, social media logic, just like mass media logic, gradually dissipates into all areas of public and social life.

To help to understand social media logic, its communication and information processes, its institutional significance, and conceptual mechanics, Poell and van Dijck offer a systematic exploration of the networked conditions of social life, by unpacking the processual dynamics of four dimensions of social media platforms, *programmability*, *popularity*, *connectivity*, and *datafication*. First regarding programmability, Poell and van Dijck argue that platform technologies are constructed on the platforms in a dual relationship between programmers and users, in which both holds agency. Programmers produce the code, algorithms, and interfaces that control user experiences, shape relations, afford the creation of user content, while the users' interactions with the platforms' technical flow add meaning to technology, thus leading to a state wherein the terms of social interaction on the platforms are constantly negotiated. Programmability is consequential for the design of sociality on social media platforms, but it is also important for the social activities mitigated by other social institutions, such as mass media, laws and regulations. Secondly, popularity on social media platforms is mainly constructed using the algorithmic power of platforms, user interaction, and socioeconomic interaction. In terms of practices, popularity is mainly conditioned by algorithmic constructions or socioeconomic components to boost traffic, e.g., advertisements or paid content. Part of Poell and van Dijck's argument is that despite popular opinions, platforms are not egalitarian. Users may be able to lift certain users' visibility and popularity through organic interactions, but platforms favour users with large followings or users who pay for increased visibility. In a wider societal interplay, standardized metrics are used outside platforms, e.g., by mass media, to capture and describe popularity and assign importance to certain users or issues. Third, Poell and van Dijck view platforms as the primary enablers of connectivity, closely related to programmability and popularity, as well as *spreadability* which involves human connectedness, networked individualism, and automated personalization. Since it is the "platform

apparatus” that mediates users’ activities and defines how connections are shaped, connectivity, they argue, is part of an advanced algorithmic strategy, wherein platforms connect users to content, users to users, platforms to users, users to advertisers, but also platforms to other platforms. Finally, datafication on platforms involves the collection of data and metadata produced by the other dimensions of programmability, popularity, and connectivity, and which allow for meaningful predictive and real-time analytics within the platforms’ media logic, but platforms also afford users, other platforms, media and institutions to contextualize platform metrics and attribute meaning to them. In this manner, datafication can be used to predict user preferences user, and as a central part of connectivity, platforms can connect content to user activities and advertisers, and furthermore, in a broad sense, data can also be aggregated to identify and trace public issues.

An important aspect of Poell and van Dijck’s understanding of datafication are the mechanics of datafication, including the boundaries of human connections, and the fact that they point out that the methods for aggregating and personalizing data are often proprietary, governed by commercial goals and technological control. These are often inaccessible to public or private scrutiny, invisible to users, and obfuscated by algorithmic steered technology. In Democracies, this goes to the heart of ownership of data and user privacy on platforms, where concerns on who control have access to user data lead to relevant questions regarding privacy in democracies, but also raise issues of the commodification of data.

Poell and van Dijck’s take on social media logic is informative and inspirational, but it is also an invitation to others researcher to explore social media logics and the media interplay with other institutions in society further, and as such, Poell and van Dijck’s contribution should be regarded as a first step towards a deeper understanding of social media logic.

In 2015, Ulrike Klinger and Jakob Svensson contributed with a different approach to the governing logic of social media platforms, by way of a network media logic which is directly related to political communication and traditional mass media (2015a, 2015b). Klinger and Svensson argue that social media platforms operate with a distinctly different logic from that of traditional mass media, though overlapping with it (see comparison in the table below), thus positioning their network media logic within media logic and media studies. In doing so, they argued that position would allow them to “move beyond framings of social media platforms as inherently good or bad, while avoiding resorting to an argument that they are neutral”, and consequently “address this non-neutrality without resorting to either

technological determinism or normalization”<sup>3</sup>. As implied by the title, the network media logic is mainly about media networks, but since it synthesizes the content production, distribution of information, and media use to a logical form, it clarifies the connectivity dimension of social media platforms, making it useful for other versions of a more specific version of social media logic.

	Mass Media Logic	Network Media Logic
Production	Expensive information selection and content generation by professional journalists according to news values	Inexpensive information selection and content generation by (lay) users according to their individual preferences and attention maximizing
Distribution	Content selected by expert/professional gatekeepers – based on established news values – distributed to a paying fixed audience of subscribers	Users are like intermediaries, distributing popular content, sometimes like a chain letter, within networks of like-minded others
Media Usage	Location bound mass audience with limited selective exposure oriented towards passive consumption of information, based on professional selection	Interest-bound and like-minded peer networks with highly selective exposure oriented towards interaction through practices of updating

Table 1: Mass media logic and network media logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015a).

In recent years, several studies of political communication on social media platforms have used either social media logic or network media logic as the theoretical backdrop.

### Reconfiguring Social Media Logic

In this conceptual reconfiguration of social media logic, as a media centred approach, I explore five dimensions of social media platforms, including *media usage, production of user generated content, connectivity and distribution, platform governance*, and finally *the political economy of platforms*. The dimensions and their constitutive elements are by no means

<sup>3</sup> In the positioning of network media logic as a non-neutral approach, Klinger and Svensson refer to Feenberg and others, but they might as well have referenced technology historian Melvin Kranzberg, who in his first law of technology writes “Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral” (Kranzberg, 1986). Kranzberg's points were that technical developments frequently have consequences that go far beyond the immediate purposes of the technical devices and practices and have quite different results when introduced into different contexts or under different circumstances. In a sense, this corresponds well to the non-normative approach found in mediatization.



exhaustive, but rather fluid, and some may be proven redundant in the near future, while new dimensions may be needed.

The basic premise for the reconfiguration is, that social media platforms were never detached from the outside world, not in any technical, communicative, cultural or societal manner. Adding to this premise are two issues. First, by conceiving social media platforms as *media* platforms, it remains possible to explore social media platforms and politics with and within existing media effects theories, like agenda setting, strong and weak ties, or public sphere theory, and as related to the theory of mediatization. All of which are in play for the empirical part of the thesis. Secondly, by applying media logic to social media platforms, as discussed earlier, it is assumed that social media platforms play a significant and independent institutional role, as media that, to reiterate Alford and Friedland's position, "have social functions and are defended by political organized interests".

The first three dimensions are informed by previous theoretical constructions of social media and social network sites, as well as the different forms of logics, which I have presented in detail above, mainly media logic, social media logic, and network media logic. The last two dimensions involve governance, here one is understood as the governance by platforms, e.g., internal moderation and external regulation, and it is called *Governance*, the other includes the governance of platform companies, but essentially deals with ownership, the relationship between media companies and technology companies, and then broader issues of the political media economy. Some would argue that those two dimensions are so closely related, that they should be merged, and they would not necessarily be wrong, but for the sake of clarity, I have chosen to split these dimensions.

### Media Usage

The role of the user and the relationships between users have been central to how the Internet and social media have been understood from the beginning. As previously discussed, one of the most significant shifts within the field of communication was the move from the unidirectional broadcast model of communication of mass media, where a few senders have the capacity to transmit information to a large audience, to a model of networked communication of interactive media, in which many senders could relay information in many directions to many receivers, or users, who in turn could interact and engage with other users. The shift in which communication moved from monologue to dialogue, was made possible by network technologies and amplified by social media, thus levelling the communicative playing field and enabling users to join an expanding interactive participatory culture.

In most sociotechnical or sociocultural contexts, users are constructed as actors within a bounded system, equipped with a profile, which can be accompanied by an image, photo, text, links, etc., and depending on user permissions and settings, a user can be public or not, can be a member of one or more different user groups or subscribe to other pages within the system. On some platforms, some identification of the user is often needed, regardless if the user employs a real name or not, but users often have to disclose their real name or identity, either by including a real name, telephone number, email address, and often the age of the user as well, for external verification for the platform owner. On some platforms, user identities can be used between platforms.

On most platforms, it is accepted to go by a false name or a nickname, if the platform knows the identity, but is common to experience fakesters, i.e. fake profiles or fake accounts, on the platforms. On social networks sites, following boyd and Ellison's early definition, users could construct a profile, which allowed them to "articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). For most ordinary users, having a profile on social media entails some sort of reciprocal relationship with other users, and the relationship can be either open or closed to other users. Some platforms afford direct messaging between users, if they are sharing a network or are connected. In an exploration of the communicative genres of social media, Stine Lomborg remarked that when contrasting social media to mass-media, "they are distinctly intended for the interpersonal communication and personalised expression of ordinary users" (Lomborg, 2011).

Moving toward a more nuanced understanding of user relationships, Ellison and boyd noted that initially becoming friends on social media sites had been viewed as a "predominantly reciprocal, meaning that a link between two people was only instantiated when both parties agreed", and in their update, they no longer write that users need to share a connection (Ellison & Boyd, 2013).

In a study of user interaction on Facebook, the researchers noted, that while "most social networking sites allow only a binary state of friendship, it has been unsurprisingly observed that not all links are created equal" (Viswanath et al., 2009). This asymmetrical relationship with users is not limited to social network sites, but it is also found on other forms of social media as well. In a study on blogging as a social activity from 2004, the researchers found that relationships between bloggers and readers were asymmetrical, and that bloggers "wanted readers but they did not necessarily want to hear a lot from those readers" (Nardi et al., 2004).

In terms of social media logic, media usage begins with politicians and parties entering and creating a presence on platforms, on which they can curate their identity and exercise their agency. Often this simply entails naming a static or semi-static platform handle that belongs to the platform account, like the @name on Twitter which cannot be changed or a profile- or page name on Facebook which can be changed. Social media adoption differs among politicians, candidates, and campaigns for a variety of reasons. Some scholars have used Rogers' (1962) theory on diffusion of innovation to explain presence and nonadoption of social media platforms among politicians (R. Gibson et al., 2014; Gulati & Williams, 2013). Gulati and Williams argue that once adoption is nearly universal, candidates can no longer derive competitive advantage from being on social media. Failure to be present then becomes a matter of organizational resources and capacity, and less a need to undertake risk to make electoral gains. Adding to this, candidates standing in elections for open seats were more likely to be early adopters of Facebook than incumbents, but incumbents used it more extensively (Williams & Gulati, 2013). Danish studies have shown that politicians' presence on social media platforms may depend on factors such as age, incumbency, and visibility in the media system (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017).

Once presence is in place, a politician's identity can be formatted and styled with profile photos, text, background images, etc., and depending on the affordances of the particular platform, self-expression can be integrated self-promotion. For ordinary users of social media platforms, this construction of an online identity can be a struggle for control over the self-representation and intimacy between the users and platforms. Van Dijck (2013) argues that this struggle is played out at the level of the interface, but that "[s]tars and politicians pre-eminently exploit the possibilities of marketing individual personalities as products". Though this process may seem trivial, it goes to the heart of constructing the politician's personae or party's identity and can add to the processes of priming and framing. Having established a presence, on some platforms it is possible to get the account verified or authenticated by the platform, which is obviously important for the identity and self-representation, but also serves a purpose for buying political ads on the platforms<sup>4</sup>. In 2009, Twitter added a blue verification seal with a checkmark to avoid impersonations which would violate Twitter's Terms of Service (Stone, 2009). In 2013, Facebook followed Twitter on this and added blue checkmarks to verify authentic accounts of "celebrities and other high-profile people and businesses on Facebook" (Capra et al., 2013). Adding to this in

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<sup>4</sup> Today, Twitter prohibits the paid promotion of political content (Rajan, 2019). In a statement on the platforms prohibited products page, Twitter writes that "we have made this decision based on our belief that political message reach should be earned, not bought" (Twitter, 2019b).

July 2014, Facebook released the *Mentions* app for iPhone in the US, making it possible for public figures with verified Facebook Pages to communicate live with their followers (Swope, 2014). Facebook expanded this function in 2016 to include the availability of *Live Video* transmission for public figures and verified Pages (Lavrusik, 2016). In terms of identity, the presence is a small part of how politicians and parties curate their identity on social media platforms, but it is central for the personalization of politics and the personal authority. As media scholar Nancy Thumim has observed using social media is mainly about socialising and not self-representation, but “in order to participate in online socialising here, people must represent themselves. Thus self-representation is a condition of participation in this online space. On Facebook self-representation becomes both inadvertent and banal” (Thumim, 2012).

Politicians and parties have agency and the means to share their political views, through a continuous content production, join the political debate, and set the political agenda, but they are also subjected to the platforms filtering techniques, based on platform metrics, verification, or use of particular platform features, which impact visibility and popularity, and adds to the asymmetrical relationship between citizens and politicians. To attain user agency, users are required to have a presence on social media platforms, but as van Dijck (2009) argues there is much more complexity to the “multifarious roles of users in a media environment where the boundaries between commerce, content and information are currently being redrawn”. As van Dijck concludes, user agency is not always controlled by the user, we must include an “accounting for technologies and site operators-owners as actors who steer user agency”. Similarly position is found by Klinger and Svensson (2018), who argue that “human agency is deeply ingrained in all elements of network media logic”, but also that human agency is characterized by and depends on routinized practices, goal seeking and purposive activities, and “deliberation and judgment over the present situation”. Then, this human agency is, according to Klinger and Svensson, distinctly different from algorithms, since these cannot independently change their “agentic orientations”.

Finally, politicians and parties, like other users on social media platforms, also acts as audiences, who need to stay informed of political developments and the political agenda, including those of the news media, party leaders and the parties’ communication, competing candidates activities, but also of the citizens and the voters opinions. As audiences, they participate in the political debates, but politicians and parties also monitor how their own and their competitors’ communication resonates and performs. Content may be shaped and shared to a wider audience based on split testing of messages on smaller

audience segments, or content can be shared in microtargeted campaigns based on different variables, such as political interests or location. Today, most social media platforms offer users different kinds of metrics, and it is possible to add external services to the platform metrics, which can be used to build complex metrical systems for analytical and organizational purposes. As noted by American media scholar David Karpf, we tend to focus on the speed of delivery, virality, reduced costs, but we need to pay attention to metrics and measurability in strategic campaigns. Politicians do (Karpf, 2017).

### Production

In Kaplan and Haenlein's paper (2010), which I have also previously discussed, they observed that the creation of user generated content was "the sum of all ways in which people make use of Social Media", but in order to be considered as user generated content, they argued that content had to adapt to the values and norms on different platforms in order to meet three basic requirements. It had to be published on a "publicly accessible website" or on a "social networking site accessible to a selected group of people", content had to "show a certain amount of creative effort", and it had to be "created outside of professional routines and practices".

Since then, practices for content creation and sharing, as well as the different types of content platforms afford have changed considerably. Today, social media platforms offer very different possibilities and types of content creation or posting. Some platforms, like Instagram and Twitter, afford users comparatively few options, whereas platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn afford a much wider range of content creation and sharing. Facebook affords a long list of content forms which are platform specific and includes text, different types of photos and images, such as photos posted on the timeline, profile photos cover photos, different types of video, including live video streaming, events, polls, etc., and Facebook also allow for posting of content across platforms as well as external content. Adding to this, content can be formatted endemically to a platform, or content can be formatted generically to be shared across platforms. Endemic video and photo formats on Instagram take on a square 1:1 format, which easily can be shared on Facebook or Twitter. It can be consumed flawlessly in a vertical oriented timeline on a smartphone, but it will not fit the screen of an ordinary computer screen or on a television set. Generic video formats, like widescreen formats, can be shared across platforms like Facebook and YouTube, but it must be cropped to perform on Instagram. Twitter allows for the upload sharing of different media types, like video and supports a variety of image formats, but with varying size limits for the different media types. On the other hand, Twitter affords appending images and video to a tweet, as well as some forms of

Twitter cards, like the Poll Card, while other card formats, like Video Website Cards and Website Cards, are supported through embedding of external metadata, when sharing links on Twitter. In short, social media platforms afford users with limits as well as possibilities for content creation and curation. As such, user generated content can be private, personal or public, and depending on the platform, it can be formatted and styled. Likewise, content can be posted on creation, be scheduled for future posting, or be produced for live consumption. Depending on platform affordances, content can be distributed organically or paid. Tarleton Gillespie have observed, then for “the most part, platforms don’t make the content, but they do make important choices about it” (Gillespie, 2018). There are exceptions, where interactions may take content form, often invoked by the production of metadata, which then become content shown to other users, e.g. likes on the feed on Twitter or users interactions, such as likes, shares and comments, in the user feed on Facebook.

Today, users still create home-made content, which resembles the features and requirements for user generated content. Politicians and parties also continue to produce content like this, but it has become commonplace among politicians and parties to have professional content produced either internally by individual politicians’ campaign staff or by the parties’ central organizations or as external content productions. Politicians often curate a string of different content, which serve different purposes. These types of curated content range from news media content, e.g. articles or broadcast video, party produced content, e.g. press releases or campaign material, but they also share content from other politicians, party members and citizens, as well as external memetic content.

Finally, hashtags have been part of the content users were afforded to post on social media platforms. In 2007, the Twitter-user Chris Messina suggested that groups could be organised on Twitter using the #-symbol (Messina, 2007). Story has it, that hashtags were popularized in the forest fires in the San Francisco area in 2007, but since then hashtags have been used to “organize discussion around specific topics or events” (Small, 2011), to denote specific political publics (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Rambukkana, 2015), specific political events, like elections (Dutceac Segesten & Bossetta, 2017; Keller & Klinger, 2018), party communication (Martínez-Rolán & Piñeiro-Otero, 2016), or in everyday politics (Larsson, 2014), and for political analytics (Karpf, 2017).

Today, hashtags are supported across most platforms. Lesser known tags, flags, and emojis are often endemic to specific platforms, like the cashtag used for business on the stock market (Bohn, 2012) or hashflags, an emoji

subset, which are used generically to indicate a specific country, but they are also used together with emojis in relation to major media events, commercially branded content, and political campaign events, such as elections (BBC Newsbeat, 2015; Chee, 2019; Stieglitz et al., 2019) on Twitter. In some cases, the use of hashflags and emojis have been monetized by Twitter. Over time, certain hashtags become solidified. In Denmark, like elsewhere, hashtags are used in political discussions on Twitter, and to a lesser degree on Facebook. The primary hashtag for Danish politics is #dkpol, but frequently used hashtags for political purposes are #ftlive for following or commenting on the debates in the Danish parliament, #kompoldk for local politics #eupol or #eudk for discussions on European politics. For general elections, the convention is to use #fv and then the year (fv for *folketingsvalg*, the election for the Danish parliament), #kv plus year for local elections, and #ep plus year followed by “dk” for elections to the European Parliament.

### Connectivity

Connectivity is a defining technological and organizing feature of social media platforms, critical for users as well as platforms. Apart from the articulation of the users’ social networks, connectivity allows users to engage with other users on social media platforms and beyond. As such, people may use social media to curate relationships and construct online sociality with weak and strong ties (M. Granovetter, 1983; M. S. Granovetter, 1973). This sociality also has implications for peoples’ political decisions, since people are not just governed by strict rationality. As Granovetter (1985) argues, in discussing why economists fail to embed theory into a broader sociality, actors “do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happened to occupy”. Adding to understanding the (re)construction and curation of social ties of social media platforms is the concept of media multiplexity. Adding to the theories of social ties, Caroline Haythornthwaite (2002, 2005) has observed that peoples media use relationships are multiplex, i.e. she notes that “strongly tied pairs make use of more of the available media”, thus people may connect through several different media depending on the strength of their relational ties. Moreover, her findings on media multiplexity show that while “the number of media used differs by tie strength, what is communicated does not differ by medium”, and adding significantly to the differential impact of ties, is that “within a group, use of media conforms to a unidimensional scale”. One of the interesting conclusions of media multiplexity is that social influence among relations with weak ties, i.e. those who are connected by fewer media, are lower than relations with strong ties.

People are enabled to share content, e.g. users can share texts and curate personal photos or videos, socialise and engage in other users content via likes or comments, much like any other form of interpersonal communication, but on digital media and social media platforms it is at scale. This networked digital connectivity of interpersonal communication at scale is transformative. As Nancy Baym (2010) argues that “many forms of digital communication can be seen by any Internet user or can be sent and resent to enormous audiences”, and this then becomes a challenge to the gatekeeping function of mass media, as digital communication is realized as a “powerful subversion of the elitism of mass media, within which a very small number of broadcasters could engage in one-to-many communication, usually within regional or geographic boundaries”. It is not only interpersonal communication that is transformed by the connectivity of digital and social media. Manuel Castells have argued that digital connectivity has transformed internet communication by a logic he described as “mass self-communication” on digital media and social media platforms. In this “mass self-communication” the intended audience is not necessarily other users, with whom the producing user shares a connection with, but rather a larger and more diffuse audience on one or multiple platforms. This connective publishing challenges not only the gatekeeping function or the elitism of mass media, but also mass media’s institutional role as setting the media agenda.

Increasingly social media platforms have structured and organized the users’ connectivity around Application Programming Interfaces, APIs, making the users’ networks and platform engagement accessible. Content from social media platforms can be shared externally and integrated with other websites, systems, or applications. Initially, data retrieval and sharing from social media platforms were made possible by the use of RSS feeds, Really Simple Syndication, or and AJAX scripts, Asynchronous Java Scripts, but it did not take platforms long to move access and sharing to Application Programming Interfaces, APIs, which served as streamlined interfaces for platforms, offering more versatile and accessible architecture for access to increasingly complex data. Access were available to ordinary users, and researchers too. For researchers studying social media platforms, access to platform APIs were regarded as “significant opportunities for Internet research of both quantitative and qualitative nature” (Lomborg & Bechmann, 2014). The main audience for access to APIs were external companies seeking to use platform data in the integration with external applications or services. Ellison and boyd (2013) have observed that “algorithms are being designed to traverse the graph and learn about the individual nodes’ relationship to one another. Such machine learning is the backbone of search engine technology, but it is increasingly central to the development of social network sites”. It is still



possible to share content outside platforms, typical these forms of sharing are embedded content on external sites, e.g. as embedded Facebook posts or embedded tweets in news media articles, and content can also be shared using sharing aggregators, like Thunderclap, or bots. In some cases, external sharing requires permission from the platforms, in other cases, not, but in most cases, external linkage will be detected by platforms.

Today, platforms have limited API access to developers for a number of reasons. First, on some platforms, access to data is realised as a commodity today, as a part of the platforms' business model. On Twitter it is possible to access the platforms API in three different ways. On the standard entry level, access is offered freely, but with a wide range of limitations, e.g. on the amount of data you can get or at the rates offered. By paying for access to data, it is possible to get access, either through the premium or enterprise entries, to extensive amounts of data, access to historical data, extended data searchability, and increasingly sophisticated levels of support. Secondly, on other platforms, like on Facebook, access to the platform's API is realised through different levels of partnerships, which in turn offer different products, such as access to the pages API, the marketing API, the analytics API, or the Messenger and Instagram APIs. Access to Facebook's platform used to be publicly available, with some limitations, but in recent years, access has been restricted (Freelon, 2018b). Adding to this, Facebook has shut down access to the platforms APIs for researchers and journalists following the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Schroepfer, 2018).

The dimension of connectivity has been at the centre of a substantial part of research in the field of social media and politics, as well as in more narrow forms of digital politics, such as computational politics and computational propaganda. For politicians and parties connecting to citizens or voters on social media platforms is paramount for their use of the platforms. Clearly, it is simply important for politicians and parties to be able to connect and communicate with voters without the interference of journalists and editors. They can distribute their political message unmediated and curate content important for their political position. It is equally important for politicians and parties to be able to connect with voters in terms of political interaction, participation, and mobilization.

In exploring the outcome of the Dutch election in 2010, Niels Spierings and Kristof Jacobs (Spierings & Jacobs, 2014) examined the candidates use of social media platforms and the one-on-one and multiplicative effects of connectivity on the voters. One-on-one effect refers to an effect which only influence the voters following a candidate. Multiplicative effect refers to a digital two-step flow of communication, in which the information transmitted

from a candidate to “his or her followers can spread out through the digital and real-life social network of these followers”. While it was not possible to differentiate between one-on-one and multiplicative effects of connectivity, Spierings and Jacobs found that politicians use of social media platforms did have a significant effect on the voters’ behaviour. Adding to this, the politicians’ activity (active use of) on platforms as well as the number of followers) were important for effect. Bearing in mind the increased media multiplexity along with increased voting effects of connectivity, this finding suggests that connectivity together with increased popularity and visibility on multiple platforms are crucial for politicians and parties, who desire to influence users in the social contexts of social media platforms, and ultimately, to win their votes.

The way users have connected on platforms have changed over time. Initially, politicians were limited to reciprocal linking on several platforms, like Facebook and LinkedIn. For personal accounts on Facebook, the maximum number of friends was limited to 5.000 friends. Today, it is possible to have a friend account which affords a non-reciprocal following, and to some politicians that is all what they need. Today on Facebook, many politicians use Facebook Pages as their main platform for interactions with the voters. One of the effects of this is a more asymmetrical relationship between the politicians and the voters, because of the platforms’ affordances, thus elevating the metrical status of the politician. Obviously, most politicians are interested in popularity and visibility, but the elevation and the use of Facebook Pages also give access to extended features on or beyond the platforms.

In November 2007, Facebook launched Pages for brands, local businesses, organizations and bands (‘Facebook Newsroom’, 2007). Significant changes were that relationships no longer needed to be reciprocal, Pages could exceed the cap on ordinary user connections, pages could be visible to unregistered users and indexed on search engines, and not least the introduction of Facebook Ads for Pages. Facebook Pages, Debate Groups, and a US Politics Application were made accessible to politicians and news outlets ahead of the 2008 US Election (‘Facebook Newsroom’, 2008). Before the recent European elections, Google, Twitter and Facebook extended their election transparency, and added more control to the platforms, cementing asymmetrical user roles in add placement for politicians, e.g. in the 2019 European elections (Allan, 2019) with the authorization of ad placement, and for all of Facebook in June 2019 (Schiff, 2019).

## Governance

Recently, Tarleton Gillespie (2018) wrote that the “fantasy of a truly “open” platform is powerful, resonating with deep, utopian notions of community and democracy—but it is just that, a fantasy”.

Fantasy or not, platform governance has always been a complex and contested subject. In recent years, it has become the centre of many heated discussions. One side holds the position, that “freedom of expression [is] essential to democracy” (Ness & van Eijk, 2019), and that platforms should be allowed to deal with platform governance by themselves, the other side thinks that platforms need to be regulated and that users need to have constitutional rights safeguarding the privacy and digital integrity (Celeste, 2018; Suzor, 2019). A major foundational cornerstone in the regulatory debate is the §230.c. *Protection for “Good Samaritan” blocking and screening of offensive material* (Office of the Law Revision Counsel, 2018: 1034), also known as the Communications Decency Act. Nicolas Suzor (2019: 78) has described the protection offered by §230 as

almost unique to the United States. For the past two decades, it has shaped the law and debates over how the world regulates internet content. For the massive service providers that are based primarily in the U.S., it is seen as absolutely vital. But around the world, it looks like U.S. free speech extremism gone too far. Other countries have much stronger rules than the U.S. does concerning defamation, privacy, and offensive content. Courts and legislatures in these countries have frequently held service providers responsible for material on their networks posted by their users. Some providers can afford to be completely based within the U.S. and mostly ignore requests from other countries, but most large commercial providers want to do business in other countries and have to work out how to deal with legal standards that differ from place to place.

Following the Brexit referendum, the United States Presidential election in 2016, including Russian interference (Walker et al., 2019) and the Cambridge Analytica scandal, public concerns have repeatedly been raised over a range of issues. This includes the use of computational propaganda and digital election interference, e.g. fake news, fake users, social bots and micro-targeting algorithms, mainly used for disseminating misinformation and disinformation on social media (Woolley & Howard, 2018), as well as intimidation, threats, hate speech, and incivility. On top of that, terrorism shared on social media platforms have spurred new demands for increased governance on platforms and extensive external control and regulation of social media platforms. Even when platforms make use of algorithms to

counter propaganda and fake news, this too has proven to be a challenge, since algorithmic and automated detection of disinformation is at best hard to achieve, and perhaps even impossible to achieve (Søe, 2018a, 2018b). Often lacking in transparency, the platforms use of algorithms, e.g. to organize newsfeeds, manage advertising, or handle users, plays into a larger discussion on artificial intelligence and machine learning, in which the challenges of the insertion of procedure into the sharing of information, insufficient privacy (Ohm, 2010), curation of human knowledge and social interaction are often highlighted (e.g. Bucher, 2018), but platform governance also contested as a regulatory field (Bygrave, 2015), as well as the centre of growing ethical concerns among scholars (Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Zarsky, 2016). For many users, the primary dealings with social media platforms' governance have to do with violations of the platforms' terms of services related to the moderation of content. Here Gillespie (2018) have observed, that platforms are either “too permissive or platforms intervene too much”, and that the platform's moderation “policies are, at best, reasonable compromises – between users with different values and expectations, as well as the demands of users and the demands for profit”.

Governance on platforms is a field of tensions (Gorwa, 2019), which from legal issues and law, trade- and copyright agreements, ethics, politics, to power, between internal self-regulation, including content moderation and user control, and external regulation, which, depending on location and platform, range from very little, if any, external regulation in the United States, to national legislation<sup>5</sup> or supranational regulation and voluntary agreements, e.g. agreements on hate speech and disinformation (European Commission, 2016, 2018) or the General Data Protection Regulation, known as GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation, 2016) in the European Union. Adding to the tensions, research in the field is fragmented into several academic disciplines, which has partly to do with how academia is structured and partly because the field is relatively new and under researched. But scholarly research also suffers from substantial disagreements on *what* should be researched, and should it include companies using digital technologies and services, but which are not media or communication companies? And secondly, lack on agreement on what constitutes ethical research (Zimmer, 2010; Zimmer & Kinder-Kurlanda, 2017), and finally sometimes research is just too limited, as are the recent cases of regulating media markets and

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of national legislation are the Defamation Act in the United Kingdom (*Defamation Act 2013*, 2013), the *Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz* in Germany (*Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz*, 2017), the Criminal Code Amendment in Australia (Criminal Code Amendment (Sharing of Abhorrent Violent Material) Act 2019, 2019), or the Proposition de loi no 388 in France (Proposition de loi n° 388, adoptée par l'Assemblée nationale, en nouvelle lecture, visant à lutter contre les contenus haineux sur internet, 2020)

political advertising, where very little is known about Facebook’s practices for running political ads (Kreiss & McGregor, 2019), and very little is known about the political consequences if advertising is banned altogether.

In practical terms, today most social media platforms regulate how users are supposed to interact with other users as well as the services offered by the platforms. Gillespie (Gillespie, 2018) notes that

The very fact of moderation shapes social media platforms as tools, as institutions, and as cultural phenomena. Across the prominent social media platforms, these rules and procedures have coalesced into functioning technical and institutional systems ...

For ordinary users, this usually involves an agreement to the platforms’ terms of services, which the user has to consent to before being allowed to use the platform, but often this also includes consent to the platforms’ privacy policies as well as a set of norms and values for the platforms. These terms of services are however not always universal. Twitter operates with two sets of Terms of Service (Twitter, 2018), one for if the user lives in the United States, and another, if the user lives outside of the United States. On Facebook the basic set of agreements includes the platform’s general *Terms of Service* (ToS), its *Data Policy* (how user information is gathered and used), its Community Standards (mainly what is not allowed on the platform and how to report abuse on the platform); and of course a consent to the use of cookies. Adding to this, Facebook has a large set of policies for other activities, which include how to use *Facebook Pages*, run ads or promotions, accept payments, or how to use the platform for political engagement.

For politicians and parties, internal and external regulations are of increasing influence and shape their operations, which today include content and user moderation on platforms. On social media platforms, politicians and parties have different possibilities available to them, such as banning or block users, hiding or deleting their posts (on Facebook), report users to the platforms for violating the platforms terms of services. One major affordance of platforms is that users can prevent users from directing posting to them. On Facebook, users can be banned from posting or have their posts hidden on a Facebook Page by its owner, on Twitter, users can be blocked by the intended recipient of a Tweet with @-mentions. These affordances, however efficient in everyday content moderation, can be problematic for free speech online. The Supreme Court in the United States have found in *Packingham v. North Carolina* (2017) that Facebook and Twitter are the “perhaps the most powerful mechanisms available to a private citizen to make his or her voice heard”, and that banning and blocking users from criticizing elected officials

is unconstitutional. In 2017, after president Donald Trump blocked users on Twitter, the United States district court for the southern district of New York found that the president’s Twitter account had become “an important source of news and information about the government, and an important public forum for speech”, and following that to suppress dissent and block users was an unconstitutional practice (Cohen et al., 2017). Similarly, banning users on Facebook in 2017, the Governor of Maine Paul R. LePage was found to violated users right to free expression by preventing them from commenting on his Facebook Page. The United States district court for the district of Maine ruled that the right to free expression on social media “is subject to the same First Amendment protections as any other speech” (Leuthy & Burton, 2017).

But politicians can also shape how social media platforms moderate content, sometimes for the good of all users of the platforms, sometimes for an exclusive group. In most cases, this shaping occurs when politicians are violating the platforms’ terms of services or community standards. In recent years, Twitter has allowed world leaders considerable latitude in the content they post on the platform. In 2019, Twitter explained that in “cases involving a world leader, we will err on the side of leaving the content up if there is a clear public interest in doing so” (Twitter, 2019a).

Finally, moderation can influence and harm politicians and parties’ presence and election campaigns, when they are prevented from using platforms. Presumably most get suspended correctly for violations of the platforms’ terms of services, community standards, or even the external agreements the platforms have accepted, but platforms may suspend users or remove content incorrectly (Gillespie, 2018; Kovic et al., 2016).

Governance is rapidly becoming a focal point for social media platforms. What is interesting is that it is no longer seem possible to keep decisions with the

### Platform Economy

The final dimension in this version of social media logic is the political economy of social media platforms. In recent years, much attention has been paid to how platform companies are constructed, how they are owned, who owns them, and how the platforms make money. Nick Srnicek (Srnicek, 2016) has contributed with valuable insights on Platform Capitalism, van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) explore the subject in the Platform Society, recently Soshana Zuboff (2019) has contributed with an interesting book on surveillance capitalism, and Christian Fuchs (2016, 2017) has written critical works about digital labour and platforms. Just to name a few.

Platform ownership has become part of the political discussions in the United States leading up to the 2020 presidential election. Recently, following Twitter's halt of political advertising and Facebook's resistance against such actions, Elizabeth Warren has made breaking Facebook into smaller companies a part of her campaign (Gambino, 2019). Political advertising aside, the sheer size and dominating market position of Facebook (Hughes, 2019) and majority share owner Mark Zuckerberg (Stewart, 2018), frequently raises an important discussion of how to deal with an uncontrolled media power and major political platform in modern democracy.

For the purpose of the social media logic outlined in this thesis, there are two major reasons why the political economy of social media platforms matters. First, digital and social media platforms have become important players in the media markets, because they have billions of users, who spend considerable amounts of time on the platforms; they are necessary for political communication today; and they influence how news of all sorts are shared on the platforms (Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2017).

Secondly, social media platforms rely on the commodification of users. That companies commodify users is not new, but completely integrated into how mass media have operated for decades (Fuchs, 2015; Smythe, 1981). As Nieborg and Poell (2018) have observed, the user commodification plays in a wider commodification of culture and society, and this is mainly governed by the volume of social media platforms' user bases, their actions and interactions, inside and outside of the platforms, and content production and consumption, are important streams of the platform companies revenue. Adding advertising to the mix of the platform companies revenues, the way platforms handle matters like content visibility and reach then becomes important factors, for ordinary users, and for politicians and parties too.

### **Mediatization**

Mediatization is closely related to media logic. Media logic is often regarded as a universal approach to how media structures social interaction within different media as well as between institutions and in society as such (Hjarvard, 2013), and as such it is sometimes considered the engine of mediatization (Mazzoleni, 2017), which includes the ways in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules. Mediatization is however not a universal process, but a long-term transformative process that takes place in modern and highly industrialized societies permeated with media, where "social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the media's influence" (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 19). Hjarvard argues that media logic, or the *modus operandi* of media, is important for the process of mediatization

for two characteristic reasons. The first is that media have become integrated into the operations of other social institutions and cultural spheres. The second reason is that media have also become “social institutions in *their own right*”. The consequence of this duality is that social interaction “increasingly takes place via the media” (Hjarvard, 2013, p. 17).

### The Mediatization of Politics

In one of the early discussions of mediatization, Gudmund Hernes (1978) argued that media not only challenged political authority and political institutions’ capacity to regulate access to knowledge, the media, and not only the political institutions, appeared to be setting the political agendas. As such, the media had positioned in a new institutional role, whereby it transformed specific areas and modes of interaction in politics. Observing this, Hernes concluded that society had become *media twisted* (Hernes, 1978). A decade later, under the impression of the growing influence of broadcast mass media, Kent Asp described mediatization as a process whereby “a political system to a high degree is influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politics” (Asp, 1986, 2011).

Reflecting over the increased interplay between politics and mass media, Mazzoleni and Schultz noted that “[m]ediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media” (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999: 250). Because of the growing importance of mass media, politicians have tried to make their behaviour compatible with media requirements, so that they accommodate the media logics, the rules and norms under which the media operates, which have permeated political communication, including the salience of issues and the composition of political agendas.

According Hjarvard, governance and political communication have adapted to the ongoing changes in the media market, and political communication is no longer a simple matter of just communicating politics, political communication has become an integrated part of doing politics. In exploring the development of mediatization in the Nordic countries, Hjarvard argued that the news media have evolved from being media serving as extensions of political parties in the 1920s to becoming independent media institutions in the 1980s, with the political role of the journalism shifting correspondingly. When the party presses were running, journalists promoted specific political interests, and then, when the news media eventually became a media institution, political journalism became integrated in the news media’s routines, and journalists increasingly acted as the citizens’ advocates and as interpreters of the political game.



## Mediatization and the News Media

Over the years, it has become an established practice for research to approach empirical studies of mediatization of politics with a conceptual focus on broadcast mass media, e.g. television, radio or newspapers (Maurer & Pfetsch, 2014; Strömbäck, 2008a; Strömbäck et al., 2012). Consequently, the main stay of research into the mediatization seem to have adopted a narrow and concrete understanding of *the media* as the journalistic news media and its logic, rather than that of media as such. The focal point for research then has become how the broadcast news media shape politics. Or as Maurer and Arendt argue, the mediatization hypothesis “suggest that the media have intruded into the political system, thereby forcing political actors to adapt their agendas increasingly to meet with the criteria of newsworthiness that the media dictates” (Maurer & Arendt, 2016, p. 6).

When Economou and Forstorp explored the mediatization of representative democracy and symbolic power in the Swedish Democracy report from 1999, they observed that journalists have positioned themselves in the role as the people's objective representatives. Journalists were working on behalf of the citizens and they were vested with new institutional power, which not only entitled them to question the political power of the elected representatives, but also gave them the right to determine which questions and issues citizens should be informed about. Consequently, journalists and the news media served as gatekeepers in the news selection process, but essentially they also controlled the political agenda (Berglez et al., 1999).

Another take on how to understand mediatization's influence on political communication as processes of profound institutional and conceptual change, Swedish media scholar Jesper Strömbäck have added volumes of inspiration to the field and provided researchers with substantial contributions and insights to the process of mediatization of politics in and because of the news media (Strömbäck, 2007, 2009; Strömbäck et al., 2013; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010).

In his paper, *Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics* (Strömbäck, 2008b), he explored mediatization as a relationship between political logic and the media logic of mass media, i.e. within traditional news media, in which television was viewed as the most dominant source of political news, but not as being more informative than other forms of mass media, e.g. newspapers or radio, and although not impressed, Strömbäck recognized a future potential for the Internet and its many logics.

Strömbäck makes an important distinction between mediation and mediatization. Using the term *mediated politics*, he refers to a situation when mass media were the main channels for political communication, where the

presentation of “reality”<sup>6</sup> is conveyed by mass media and people’s perception of reality is influenced by mass media. Strömbäck considers mediatization to be a dynamic, nonlinear process-oriented concept, in which the concepts of media logic are essential, that goes through four phases where media requirements “are dominant and shapes the means by which political communication is played out by political actors, is covered by the media, and is understood by the people”. While Strömbäck argues that the media effects theories are important, they are however insufficient for understanding the process of mediatization, since they “fail to appreciate the interactions, interdependencies, and transactions at a system level and with regards to how the media shape and reshape politics, culture, and people’s sense making”. Adding to this, they also “largely fail to recognize the reciprocal effects of the mass media on the subjects of media coverage”.

To understand the process of mediatization, Strömbäck divided the process into four phases, where each phase is characterized by a transition from one logical state to another. The first phase of mediatization is reached whenever mass media constitute the most important source of information and channel of communication between citizens, political institutions, and political actors, e.g., parties or political interest groups. This is also when politics is mediated. People depend on the news media for information about politics. Conversely, politicians and other powerful elites depend on news media for information about peoples’ opinions. The second phase of mediatization is reached when the autonomy of the media has increased to the degree that the media become independent of political institutions and actors. This process is characterized by increased journalistic professionalization, the news media’s approach to politics become more pragmatic and less revered, and commercialization increase. Political actors are still strong, but they have lost their autonomy. They can no longer control the news media, but they need to develop or strengthen competences in public relations and news management. In the third phase of mediatization, the independence of the media is increased to a degree where political actors must adapt to the media’s daily operations. The importance of media logic is increased, and political actors cannot rely on news media to accommodate them. News media prefer narratives which include conflicts, personalization, and events, rather than coverage of substantial politics. Finally, in the fourth phase of mediatization, political actors not only adapt to media logic and the predominant news values, but also internalize these, and in some cases, actors no longer make a distinction between political logic and media logic. With the media as the dominant source of information, all levels of society are permeated with media and their

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<sup>6</sup> Strömbäck put *reality* in quotation marks, apparently to emphasize that reality is a media construction, shaped in part by media logic to accommodate mass media requirements.

communicative output, and in some respects, “mediated realities replace the notion of a belief in objective realities”. Media logic is perceived to be virtually unescapable, but not unmanageable, and as such it “equates to a problem that requires constant attention”. In the transition from the third phase to the fourth, there is an increase in the professionalization of politics and political campaigning, and eventually, this leads to a state of permanent campaigning. Just as Strömbäck noticed, Papadopoulos (2013) observed that in submitting to the media logic of mass media a trade-off occurs, in which to “gain media influence, political actors accept that they will lose their autonomy and that their behaviour to a significant extent will be dictated by the rules of the game that the media sets. Not only are parties now more heavily dependent on the media than in the past, but the media is also more independent from them”.

In researching how mediatization influence television news reporting from the political campaign, Cushion, Thomas, and Ellis explored the selection and representation of the campaign news that could indicate the increased mediatization of election reporting and commentary, e.g., seen as in clips with politicians delivering *sound bites*, framed by the news anchor and often served with on-screen comments added, or in visually strong *image bites*, where politicians appear on-screen, but are not heard. The use of these conventions, the researchers found that “journalistic logic is seen to trump political logic, representing a mediatization of election reporting”. Adding to this, exploring the journalists reporting from the campaigns revealed an increase in mediatization by which the journalists were found to have moved from factual reporting to actively interpretative coverage of the political campaigns. And in reinforcing mediatization, low-key election campaigns seemed to attract less attention than campaigns with efficient spin tactics and news management that play well with *horse race* coverage, including the extensive use of opinion polls, speculations about election prospects, and public opinion commentary about particular actors, and as such the consequences of this mediatized coverage favoured the strategic game frame rather than policy deliberations (Cushion & Thomas, 2013).

### **Personalization of Politics**

In the past decades, there has been an increased focus on the individual candidate and less focus on party politics. The general theory is that the personalization of politics can viewed as a result of increased mediatization. In most Western democracies, electoral politics have always been closely related to the individual candidate. Even representative democracies with strong and stable party systems are no exceptions. Candidates – even those from parties with strong communitarian cultures – are elected as the personal representatives of the voters. This is no coincidence, since most formal

elections are governed by constitutions or laws, in which the personal candidacy is manifest. Since the rise of political parties in the mid-1850s, candidacy has been strongly affiliated with parties, local communities, as well as shared ideologies and political culture. Studies of Canadian politics have showed, that “leaders have always mattered” (Bittner, 2018). In most Western democracies, party membership was a precondition for standing in elections, and often necessary for winning. In a parliamentary context, politicians are dependent on the support of a party to get legislation passed, but they also need collegiality of fellow parliamentarians, and, to some extent, most parliaments require the cooperation between politicians and their collective will to secure independence, integrity, and legitimacy of the parliament. They also need to muster the power to keep the other branches of government in check. Nevertheless, since the 1950s, the personalization of politics seem to have increased. Initially, the increase was considered a result of horse racing election systems and the presidentialization thesis of politics, but the personalization of politics is not, as Ian McAllister has observed, restricted to presidential systems, nor is it caused by changes in the formal institutional structures (McAllister, 2007). In McAllister’s *The Personalization of Politics*, television has played a central role in this process, but television does not ensure election. As McAllister observes, that “[w]hile television exposure is a necessary condition to ensure a leader’s competitiveness, it is not a sufficient condition for his or her electoral success” (McAllister, 2007).

The dominating theory is, that personalization is the result of a fundamental changes in the media system, which can be attributed to broadcast media, like television and radio, hence, personalization of politics can be seen as an indicator of mediatization. Adding to this, Esser and Matthes have observed that the prevailing argument for the personalization of politics is, that “news coverage emphasizing candidates, politicians, and personalities has increased over time when compared to organizations, parties, and issues”, while it is “believed that the relevance of political parties in the political communication process is waning and this, in turn, opens the door to personalities as transmitters of political messages” (Esser & Matthes, 2013).

Often packaged together with the personalization and the presidentialization thesis, is the concept of *spectacularization*. Spectacularization refers to how commercial media focus on the personal often is done with more than a touch of dramatic style to favour the political game. Here political communication is distinctly more expressive, dramatic, and dazzling, than the mere communication of the messages of individual politicians. This, Kriesi observed, is “an element of communication style that also has its roots in the commercialization of the media and that marries the language of politics with that of advertising, public relations (PR) and show business” (Kriesi, 2012).

A related explanation is offered by Corner and Pels, who propose that is consumerism and cynicism, often blended with political indifference, have restructured the field for political representations and good citizenship, thus “downplaying traditional forms of ideological and party-based allegiance, and foregrounding matters of aesthetics and style political”. Political style, then, “operate as a focus for post-ideological lifestyle choices”. Or, as Corner and Pels conclude, “increasingly people want to vote for persons in their ideas rather than for political parties in their programs” (Corner & Pels, 2003). In describing the modernization of Swedish election campaigns, Kent Asp and Peter Esaiasson observed a similar tendency towards greater individualization among the electorate, which together with a weakened influence of party structures is seen expressed in the voters’ increasing criticism of and independence from the political parties. Until recently, voting was closely related to socioeconomic conditions and class affiliation, but this affiliation has been replaced by ideological voting as well as issue voting, making the electorates’ voting more volatile. According to Asp and Esaiasson, a conceivable consequence of this situation is, that Swedish campaigns might become more like the candidate centred American campaigns, thus adding to the decline of political parties. Adding to this, they note that one consequence of the lessened party affiliation among the electorate, is that parties have grown stronger among the political elite, and that the Swedish members of parliament more easily accept a strong party discipline than earlier. Moreover, as the electorate is shifting, and traditional structures have become weaker, highly professionalized campaigns have become more important for the political candidates’ short election campaigns and for the electoral outcome.

### Social Media and Mediatization

In moving forward, studies of digital and social media have become more prominent within mediatization theory in recent years. In the early years of political communication prior to social media, in the New Media, New Politics 1.0 era, parties and candidates use of Internet technologies were explored as a sign of increasing mediatization caused by new Internet technology. In a series of studies, Schweitzer (2005, 2011, 2012) observed that digital skills and competences were regarded as closely related to politicians and parties ability to inform voters and add political views and substance to the political campaigns.

Having studied Norwegian politicians use of social media in national and local election campaigns, Enli and Skogerbø argued that personalization does not occur because of politicians’ presence on social media, but should be regarded as an aspect of the mediatization of politics, in which “social media fit into long-term ongoing processes where political communication has

become increasingly focused on personalities and personal traits of politicians” (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013).

Similarly, Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart, and de Vreese (2013) have studied the personalization of Dutch politicians on social media platforms and consequently their interactions with citizens. Among their findings was that because politicians and political parties increasingly used the interactive affordances of social media, making communication more individual, this could lead to an increase in citizens’ engagement in politics, thus be beneficial for democracy. In a study of Dutch politicians on Twitter, Sanne Kruikemeier (2014) found that the use of Twitter was good for the candidates self-promotion and their popularity on the platform. More importantly, Kruikemeier found that the positive electoral effect, i.e., more preferential votes, of Twitter use was not large, but significant, “above and beyond the effects of established factors”. In a study of the dynamics of politicians’ visibility in the mass news media and social media, i.e. Facebook and Twitter, in the Dutch national elections in 2012, Kruikemeier, Gattermann, and Vliegenthart found that “lead candidates benefit from increasing visibility in newspapers compared to other candidates as the former also gain popularity on social media”, thus supporting the so-called normalization hypothesis in which “social media replicate existing imbalanced representations in traditional media”. Adding to their findings were that candidates “who receive little attention in traditional media, such as female politicians or candidates with a lower position on electoral lists, also face more difficulties translating social media visibility into exposure in the traditional media”. Maybe not surprising, this suggests that personalization benefit candidates, such as party leaders or lead candidates, who already have a prominent status. As a final finding from Dutch politics, Metz, Kruikemeier, and Lecheler (2019) studied different types of self-personalization of politics on Facebook, i.e. professional emotional private personalization, viewed as a multi-layered concept in which personalization is not at the expense of political parties, and they found that overall self-personalization was higher for Facebook posts containing a visual. Interestingly, they also found that professional self-personalization was the most used self-personalization strategy, even though it did not exert any effect on audience engagement, whereas private self-personalization, which did stimulate audience engagement, was rarely used.

As seen in the referenced studies above, the use of social media seems to have impact political communication and has electoral effects, but social media also serve to increase mediatization. As Stig Hjarvard (2019) has observed the “integration of digital and online media into ever-more social and cultural spheres represents an *intensified mediatization* that not only allows for ‘more’ digital interaction but also restructures the social conditions under which we

interact”. As a part of this restructuring, social media are not only used to “communicate social relationships but also produce new forms of sociality”, which includes “new forms of networked relationships and social interactions that involve a change of social dependencies between the individual, the wider community, and the media”.

Here the reconfiguration is shaped by the architecture and affordances of social media, but also by people’s social contexts, identities, and practices. In most cases, these social dependencies rely on reciprocal relationships between institutions as mediatization expands and intensifies: Politicians and parties rely on social media, but social media also rely on the politicians and parties.

### 3. The Danish Case: Social Media and Politics

This chapter is about contexts. In the previous chapter, I argued for the importance of understanding social media logic and the mediatization of politics in a national context. After a short introduction to the shape of the Danish state and society, I explore three different contexts which are important for the understanding of how social media platforms are used in Danish politics. These are the political system, the media system, and the state of Danish research.

#### **The State of Denmark**

The Kingdom of Denmark is a small Scandinavian country located in Northern Europe with a history as a state, which dates to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The kingdom is thought to be the oldest in the world. Formally, Denmark has been a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy since the country's first Constitutional Act in 1848. After losing large areas of southern Denmark to Germany in the war of 1864, and later regaining southern Jutland by referendum in 1920, Denmark became a monolingual nation, with Danish as the language throughout the country. Since then, Denmark has consisted of more than 400 islands and one larger peninsula, Jutland, which shares Denmark's only land based border of 68 kilometres with Germany (Statistics Denmark, 2010).

In 2019 Denmark reached a population of approximately 5.8 million citizens (Statistics Denmark, 2019), but the Danish Realm also includes Greenland, with a population of 56.225 citizens (Statistics Greenland, 2019), and the Faroe Islands, with a population of 51.894 citizens (Statistics Faroe Islands, 2019), in the North Atlantic. Greenland achieved home rule in 1979, and this was extended to a self-government agreement in 2009 (The Prime Minister's Office, 2019b) and the Faroe Islands have had home rule since 1948, which was extended in 2005, to let the Faroe Islands take over more control of its own affairs (The Prime Minister's Office, 2019a). Denmark has been a member of the European Union since 1973, and it is a founding member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, since 1949, the United Nations since 1949, and the Nordic Council since 1952.

Corporation and cultural exchange between the Nordic states are closely integrated, and, basically, the countries share a common labour market, share social security benefits, as well as a passport union. Until recently, citizens could move freely between the countries, but because of the refugee and



migration crisis in 2015, Sweden introduced temporary identity and passport control at its borders. Beyond formal corporation, the Nordic countries not only share an extensive cultural and cross-lingual heritage, but also a common history. Danish society can be described as a variant of the Nordic welfare state system. As part of the comprehensive welfare state, the Danish economy is founded on free market capitalism with a progressive tax system, and economic equality, with comparatively small differences in income between gender and class. The labour market is dynamic and well-organized with a high degree of the workforce unionised, which includes collective bargaining and a system of *flexicurity*, which offers economic security for workers in case of unemployment and a flexible workforce for employers. In the welfare state citizens pay a substantial part of their salaries in tax, but they also enjoy universal rights, which includes large scale public services, such as elder care, universal health care, parental maternity leave, access to day care centres, kindergartens, high schools and further education, all the way to university level (Runge, 2017). The state plays a central and deciding role in the development of public infrastructure, but often the actual infrastructure is supplied by private companies.

### **Population, Culture, and Religion**

The overall composition of Danish society is that of a very homogenous population. More than 86 percent of the population have their origin in Denmark, about 5 percent are from Western countries, and close to nine percent have their origin in non-Western countries. The national church, *the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark*, is part of the constitutional foundation of the Danish national state, yet in terms of religious orientation, religion is commonly viewed as a private matter and religion plays a less prominent role in Danish society (Hjarvard & Lövheim, 2012). In general terms, Danes appear to be secular, and Christian rituals, e.g. Christmas and Easter, are celebrated as longstanding cultural conventions (Birk, 2016). Despite a decline in membership, a considerably number of Danes are still members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. The second largest religious orientation in Denmark is Islam. In 2017, the number of Muslims was cautiously estimated to be around five percent of the population (Nielsen, 2017).

Despite secularization, there is a close relationship between the church and political culture in large and mostly rural parts of Denmark, whereas the ties in larger urban areas have gradually become very loose. Until a largescale reform of local authorities in 1970, Denmark had 1.098 local councils outside larger cities which shared or resembled the same small administrative boundaries as church parishes. Local councils were aptly named parish councils, while the church councils within the same area were called parochial

church councils. Though there were only few organizational overlaps between parish churches and councils, e.g., the church was tasked with registering births and deaths in the parishes, both entities have served as the official centres in small scale communities, in many cases just small villages with less than 3.000 citizens, with closely related cultural ties. The church still offers confirmations and communion to many young Danes. The local municipalities have taken care of formal education and childcare, like kindergartens and schools, as well as cultural institutions, like libraries, and facilities for sports activities. The divide between rural and urban areas in Denmark, is also realised in terms of occupations. In rural and costal parts of Denmark, farming and fishing have been the traditional and important ways of making a living, whereas industrial work and educational facilities, e.g., colleges, professional training, and universities, are more prevalent in urban areas. Traditionally, citizens in rural areas tended to be more liberal, conservative, and right wing, whereas citizens in urban areas leaned more to towards the liberal centre, the Social Democratic Party, and the spiring left-wing parties. As such political orientations have remained stable for long, but a slow demographical shift, marked by citizens moving from rural areas to more urban areas, has slowly changed the political landscape and the citizens affinity with political parties.

### **Political Culture and Party Affinity**

The difference in cultures, occupations, as well as class differences are reflected in Danish parties and across the political spectrum. For decades following the first Constitutional Act in 1848, the Danish political system and political culture evolved around a so-called *four party system*, in which the major parties, *The Conservative Party*, *the Danish Social Democrats*, *the Liberal Party*, and *the Social Liberal Party* dominated the political arenas. The Conservative Party represented the elite, e.g., the rural nobility and the city bourgeoisie, industrialists, manufactures, capitalists, bankers, and the upper ranks of the military. The Social Democratic Party, and increasingly the smaller left-wing parties, enjoyed the support from the working class in urban and industrialized areas of Denmark as well of the trade unions. In rural areas, the Liberal Party was the main political party, which was reflected the composition in the local parishes, where the party had a large network of many small, but strong and powerful organizations. The smallest of the four parties, the Social Liberal Party was closely related to the cultural elites in the cities, but also to strong segments among the small farmers in rural Denmark. The parties have been woven into the fabric of society in a variety of ways, from party organisations, trade unions, vocational education, sporting associations, social clubs, and news media. One example of this, is how the four old parties were instrumental for civic enlightenment and in creating

educational associations for party members, but also for the public in general. The associations offered vocational training, but also courses in arts, crafts, and culture. Here the Social Democratic Party was affiliated with the *Workers Educational Association*, the *Liberal Educational Association*, The Conservative Party with the *Popular Educational Association*, the Liberal Party with the *Liberal Educational Association*, and the Social Liberal party was affiliated with the *Independent Information Association*. Another example of the parties' role in society were the party newspapers. After the first Constitutional Act of 1848, independent newspapers blossomed, but with the rise of political parties around the turn of the century, newspapers with close ties to the parties came into existence or existing newspapers chose a political side, paving the way for the so-called *four party media system*. On a national level and in some of the larger cities, newspapers became the voice of the four political parties. This system persisted until the 1960s and 1970s, where it was gradually replaced by the *omnibus* newspapers alongside independent journalism and increased commercialisation of the newspaper industry (Schultz, 2007). But even if the newspapers became independent of party politics, many of them still represent political views found among the political parties. This most visible in traditional newspapers, which still favours the papers' editorials, the commentaries, and the analyses of the political news, whereas as newspaper which just reports the news without commentaries are often understood as neutral (Hjarvard, 2007).

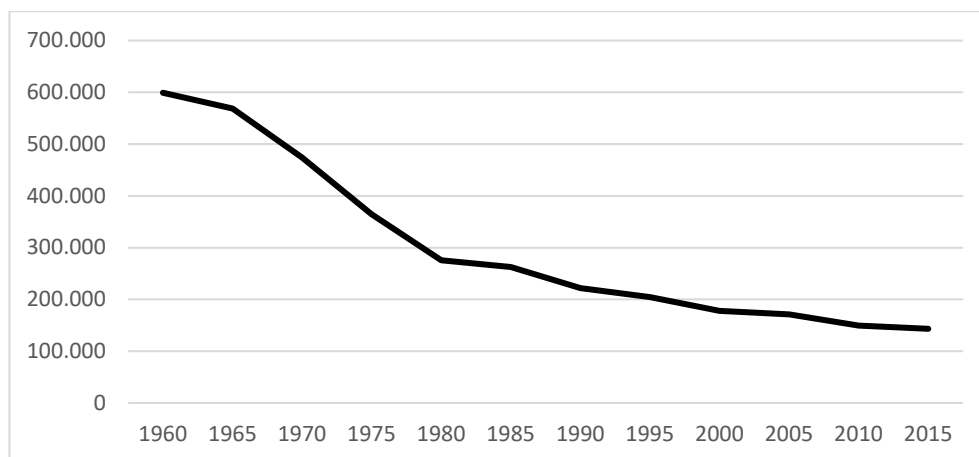
### **The Political System**

The Danish political system is a tripartite system, built on the principle of separation of powers between the legislative power, the executive power, and the judiciary power. The first Constitutional Act of 1849 instituted a bicameral parliamentary system in Denmark. Citizens were given the right to vote and to stand for election for the lower house, *Folketinget*. The upper house, *Landstinget* was constructed much like the British House of Lords in which members were appointed for an eight year term by an electoral college. In 1953, a new Constitutional Act was enacted, which ended the bicameral system and a new unicameral system was instituted, in which members were elected for four year terms in open list parliamentary elections in multi-member constituencies. This system is still in place. Following the Constitutional Act of 1953 (Pedersen, 2014), no institution, person or party is above the parliament, and its members are only bound by their own conscience. Although there is no mention of parties in the Constitutional Act, there are rules regulating the parties' roles in elections as well as guides for the parties, such as in the Standing Orders of the Danish Parliament (*Folketinget*, 2018).

The political agenda in Denmark gravitates around a string of institutionalized ritual events. Legislation is adopted throughout the parliamentary year following the rules of the Constitutional Act and the Standing Orders of the Danish Parliament, which runs from the first Tuesday in October to the first Tuesday the following year. The parliamentary year is, roughly speaking, split into two parts. In opening the fall session, the Prime Minister must provide an “account of the general state of the country and of the measures proposed by the Government”. The measures proposed are compiled into a financial bill, which is adopted by parliament in the latter part of the fall session. In the spring session, the funds allocated are transformed into executable legislation after negotiations in parliament, but for a law to pass through parliament, it must be deliberated upon three times in parliament. The final legislative process ends in spring, usually in late May or the beginning of June, when the Prime Minister concludes the parliamentary year. Adding to these ritualized events are the Queen and the Prime Ministers New Year’s speeches as well as the frequent Prime Minister’s Question hours.

### Politicians and Parties

While many Danes still have some affinity with the parties, party memberships are declining, much like elsewhere in Western Europe in the past decades. Since the 1960s, Danish parties have lost more than two thirds of their members. In terms of individual parties, the traditional mass parties in Denmark, i.e., the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, and the Conservative Party have been affected the most. Populist parties, like the right-wing Danish People’s Party, as well as newly founded parties, like the Liberal Alliance, have experienced an increase in memberships in recent years, though on much smaller scale. Despite heavy membership losses among the traditional mass parties, the Social Democratic and the Liberal Party are still the largest parties in Denmark in terms of party memberships, as well as in votes in the recent elections.



*Illustration 1: Party Membership from 1960 to 2015.*

Increasingly, Danish parties have transformed into being professional operated organisations rather than mass parties relying on the engagement of party members. Not only have political communication and campaigning been professionalized in many parties, but other typical party matters are now left to professionals, e.g. organizational work, such as party administration, accounting, and member management, or not least policy development, whereas members participate in party conferences and are mobilized for electioneering. (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2017).

Adding to this, new parties, left and right, with few, but strong issue on their agendas, have emerged in the past decade, adding slightly to the fragmentation of Danish politics. Though these parties do affiliate themselves with more traditional political orientations, generally they do not have strong ideological foundations, if any. Since the 1970s, a stable number of parties have been represented in the Danish parliament, and the slightly increased fragmentation among the parties seem to have to do with the salience of current political issues and a shift of the political agenda, as well as the personal leadership of the new parties. Finally, there are few signs that the increased political fragmentation will change. On the contrary, it seems to continue, as there currently are 249 newly registered parties by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior (Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior, 2019).

### **The Electoral System**

Despite a decline in party memberships, the political participation in elections have remained high and stable over the years. In general elections on a national level, also known as *first order elections*, the participation percentage is usually around the mid-eighty percent, and since 1998 participation has averaged 86 percent in the general elections. In local elections and elections for the European Parliament, known as *second order elections*, numbers have been equally stable but with lower participation.

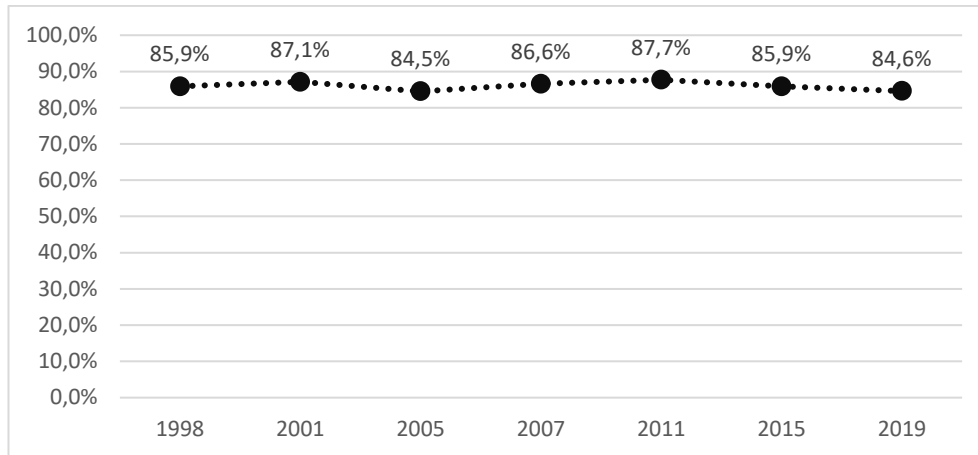


Illustration 2: Participation in general elections 1998 – 2019.

In general elections, there is a lower threshold of two percent of the votes to get candidates elected. Parties, that fail to get above the threshold, or independent candidates standing in a single district can get members elected by securing enough votes for one mandate. This is very rare.

To participate in general elections in Denmark, the voter must be 18 years old on the day the general election is held. While Danish citizens, including those living abroad, can vote in all elections, whereas EU citizens can vote in regional and local elections, as well as in the elections for the European Parliament, but not in general elections or referendums. The same rules apply for candidates wishing to stand for election.

The Danish parliament, *Folketinget*, has 179 members. For the 175 members elected in Denmark, 140 win their seat in one of the ten multimember constituencies, which are subdivided into local constituencies. The remaining 35 seats are distributed proportionally according to the parties' national vote shares. Two members are elected in Greenland and two are elected in the Faroe Islands. The national election system is a pluralistic, open list, multiparty democracy, in which candidates stand for parliamentary seats in competitive elections for the four-year terms. Usually, elections are called at the end of term, but they can be called ahead of schedule, which happened in 1988, 1990 and 2007. There are no specific laws regarding how long elections should be called before the actual election day, but a string of practical rules, outlined in the Danish election law, guides the process (Folketingsvalgloven, 2019). In the elections from 1988 to 2019, election campaigns have averaged 21,6 days. The shortest lasted twenty days, the longest twenty-nine days.

Parties can choose to nominate a preferred candidate, which then will be at the top of the list in a district. The rest of the party's candidates will be listed alphabetically, but the preferred candidate will get all the party votes. Parties

can also choose to nominate a preferred candidate, while the rest of the party's candidates will be listed in a fixed order.

Today, the most common form of candidacy is standing in parallel, but parties can choose between several forms. Party candidates in multi-member constituencies stand in parallel in each nomination district. Party votes are distributed according to how many personal votes each candidate get. Parties can have their candidates stand in parallel in each nomination district, in alphabetical order, but the party can still nominate a preferred candidate. Then party votes are distributed according to how many personal votes each candidate get. The way candidates stand for election may seem trivial, but the forms of candidacy seem have an impact on how candidates and parties run their election campaigns, including the way they use digital and social media in the campaigns.

Parties represented in parliament are entitled to run for elections without prior approval by the Home Office. Parties without representation must go through a registration process, which involves getting endorsements from voters in the form of signed affidavits amounting to 1/175 of the valid votes cast in the previous election, corresponding to one seat in parliament. Previously, the registration process was a lengthy and complicated two-step manual, in which signed affidavits had to be collected and registered at the Home Office, which then would verify them by sending postal mail to the voters, asking for a confirmation of their signature. The affidavits validity is limited to one year. If enough affidavits are confirmed, the party is cleared to stand for election, unless the signed affidavits expired, in which case the party would have to start the process all over. The overall process was slow and uncertain, and for years various procedures for improve the process has been discussed in parliament. In preparation for the general election in 2019, the manual process of registering voter affidavits by mail was replaced by a digital system, in which the voters could sign an affidavit digitally, then wait a week, and then finalize the confirmation process. Unfortunately, the system was flawed, so parties could bypass the grace period. Voters could sign the affidavit and subsequently confirm it without any significant delay.

The regulation of election campaigns is limited in the Danish system, compared to other systems. The ground rules are, that candidates and parties cannot run election ads on television, but they are allotted a televised party presentation and the party leaders participate in televised debate during the election. Another widely used campaign media are the election posters. There are strict local rules for election posters in the public space. These rules include the placement of election posters, when they can be posted, and for

how long. Violations of the rules can lead to fines and the removal of election posters at the expense of the individual candidates or party.

Political parties receive substantial financial support from the state to run election campaigns as well as maintaining daily work in the parliament. The support supplements the parties' private income from membership fees, donations, and fundraising, which is conditioned by some degree of financial transparency and independent oversight, conducted by the *Danish Fundraising Board*. Finally, when an election is called, government ministers have to fire their special advisors, also known as spin doctors, since they are not allowed to participate in election campaigns while being employed by the government (Moderniseringsstyrelsen, 2016). In recent years, the increases in the financial support for the parties' political communication and election campaign have led to an increase in spending on consultants, also when it comes to the use of social media.

After almost a decade of governments led by the Social Democratic Party, a massive win by the right-wing parties in the 2001 election secured the *Liberal Party* government power until the election in 2011. In the past two decades, the *Liberal Party* has been leading Danish governments for fourteen years altogether. Although the number of parties represented in parliament seems stable and political power appears to last for long stretches of time, the recent history of Danish politics is riddled by constant small shifts in parties and party splintering. Adding to this, governments rarely have absolute majority in parliament, and therefore they need to secure support from other parties.

In 2001, Anders Fogh Rasmussen became the Prime Minister, and subsequently headed three different cabinets until to 2009, when he became Secretary General of NATO. From 2009 to 2011, the new party chairman Lars Løkke Rasmussen became Prime Minister. Central to this long period of governments led by the Liberal Party was the support of the Danish People's Party. The Danish Peoples Party was a splinter party formed by former members of the radical right-wing party, the Progress Party. Unlike the Progress Party, the Danish Peoples Party's approach to politics was far more pragmatic, which made cooperation with the other parties in parliament possible, primarily with the other right wing parties.

In 2007, the party *New Alliance* was founded by two members of the *Social Liberal Party* and one from the *Conservative Party*. In the election the same year, the party gained five seats in parliament, but was split the following year after a decision to support the right-wing coalition government. After a tumultuous start, with internal disagreements policy issues and the exit from the party of three of the party's five members of parliament, it was transformed into a new party, the Liberal Alliance, in 2008. Initially, the new party did not



have any real influence on government policies since the government had enough votes to secure a majority. This majority was lost, when disagreements within the Conservative Party caused a split of the votes, which in turn left the government suddenly dependent on the votes of the Liberal Alliance.

In 2011, the social democrat *Helle Thorning-Schmidt* won the election together with the Socialist People's Party, headed by *Villy Søvndal*, on classic left-wing policies, but to secure support for a new government, the two parties had to enter into a coalition government with the Social Liberal Party. Eventually, internal disagreements within the Socialist People's Party over policy issue and the election of a new party chairman, *Annette Vilhelmsen*, led to a party split and the collapse of the government in 2014.

Although the Socialist People's Party left the government, Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt still had the party's support to form a government between the Social Democratic Party and the Social Liberal Party which lasted until the 2015 election, when the Liberal Party won the election and formed a one-party minority government. In 2016, in addressing mounting disagreements between the government and its supporting parties, the Liberal Party brokered a deal to form a coalition government with the Conservative Party and the Liberal Alliance.

Following the 2019 election, ten parties had candidates elected in the Danish constituencies. These parties are the *Liberal Party*, the *Social Democratic Party*, the *Danish People's Party*, the *Social Liberal Party*, the *Socialist People's Party*, the *Unity List*, *Liberal Alliance*, the *Conservative Party*, the *Alternative*, and the *New Right*. The parties from Greenland, *Inuit Ataqatigiit* and *Siumut*, and two from the Faroe Islands, *Javnaðarflokkurin* and *Sambandsflokkurin*. The current government is a minority government, headed by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, party leader of the Social Democratic Party, with the support of the left-wing parties, the Socialist People's Party and the Unity List, and the centre party, the Social Liberal Party.

### **The Danish Media System**

At the turn of the millennium, in a comparative study of what characterized the Danish media system Hallin and Mancini described it as being a *democratic corporatist* with a long history of private media (e.g. national, regional and local newspapers), and strong public service media, (e.g. television and radio), and a media centred approach to political news, rather than one of political affinity (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). According to Hjarvard, the news media still have distinct political orientations, but there has been a declining level of political parallelism, i.e. political affiliation with

political parties, since the 1950s where newspapers affiliated with the major parties vanished or transformed into omnibus press reaching for a broader audience (Hjarvard, 2007).

Freedom of the press is a core value in the Danish media system, and the Constitutional Act explicitly prohibits state censorship. The media system is characterised by a high degree of journalistic professionalism, but also with extensive self-regulation institutionalized by the public, yet independent *Press Council*, instituted in The Media Liability Act. The Press Council oversees the compliance with the ethical rules of the news media (The Press Ethical Rules, 2013).

### **Radio and Television**

Since the beginning of broadcast radio in 1925 and television in 1951, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation held a monopoly in national public service broadcasting, until it was deregulated in 2011 for radio and in 1989 for television, though local and regional radio- and television stations, deregulation came earlier. The Danish public service media are regulated and, some, but not all, are public funded, and some private news media receive public funding for daily operations, distribution, or media innovation.

Currently, Danish television viewers have the option to access to 38 Danish language channels, delivered from two national public service broadcasters, six commercial broadcasting companies, one independent channel, and finally, the Danish parliament. As such, the market is populated with the public service companies *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* and *TV2 Denmark*, and the commercial broadcast companies *Nordic Entertainment Group*, *Discovery*, *Viacom*, *Turner*, *Fox*, and *Disney*. Adding to this there is an independent television company, *DK4*, which operates on government subsidies. Finally, the Danish parliament has its own television channel, offered as a daily? streaming service as well as a broadcasting channel, which is a “must carry” channel for cable providers in Denmark, just as the main channels from the public services broadcasters, the *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* and *TV2 Denmark*.

The *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* and *TV2 Denmark* are public service companies, both owned by the state under the rules of a public service agreement passed by parliament, but with different ownership structures. The *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* is a public service company, owned and financed by mandatory licensing, but with independent planning. From 1951 to 1989 the *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* was the only provider of national television, essentially a monopoly running one public service television channel only, in the late afternoons and evenings. In 1989, *TV2 Denmark* was launched as public service, commercial television station,

running ads but with some public financing, to break the monopoly. In the years following, several commercial companies entered the Danish television market. Today *TV2 Denmark* is a state-owned public service company, but it operates independently of government control, and is no longer subsidized by the state, but acts as a commercial company.

In terms of national broadcast news, it is only provided by the *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* and *TV2 Denmark*, albeit very differently. The commercial broadcast companies do not offer any news programmes or channels, but mainly supply Danes with entertainment and sports. Both public service companies run news programmes, which are integrated into their flow surfaces. For the *Danish Broadcasting Corporation* news is served on two channels, DR1 and DR2. *TV2 Denmark* has news programmes integrated into the flow on the main channel, TV2, but in addition it runs a dedicated around the clock news channel, *TV2 News*. Regional television is supplied across Denmark by eight different independent stations, which are organized as TV2-Regions, since they deliver local news segments every evening to the main channel TV2, as part of the public service agreement. The regional stations are financed by money from the mandatory licensing. Apart from that, the regional stations can broadcast regional television around the clock, but supply varies from region to region.

### Newspapers

In recent decades, the Danish media market has experienced several groundbreaking transformations. In the 1990s, following the end of Danish Broadcasting Corporation's monopoly on television, there was a surge in commercial television, broadcasting from within Denmark or from abroad, mainly the United Kingdom, via satellite or cable television. In the early 2000s, the Danish newspaper market was upset by a string of events. In 2000, the Danish newspaper group, Berlingske Officin, including the major daily paper Berlingske Tidende, was sold to the Norwegian media company, Orkla Media (Møller Christensen, 2000). Later, in 2006, the company was sold to Mecom Group, owned by Rupert Murdoch (Andresen, 2006), and again, in 2014, to Belgian media company De Persgroep (ritzau, 2014). In 2001, several free daily newspapers, e.g. metroXpress, Nyhedsavisen, and Urban, plunged into the Danish media system, adding to the competition in the advertising market for newspapers (Kammer, 2009). Between private news media, competition in the Danish media market increased. Adding to the competition in the past decades, Danish news media have entered the Internet, where a mix of new actors, private news media and public service media, deliver online news (Hjarvard & Kammer, 2015; Kammer, 2013).

Correspondingly, with deregulation of broadcast television, increased commercialization and digitalization, the Danish media system experienced an increased competition, but also a maintenance of government subsidies to ensure media pluralism. At the time of deregulation, in 2004, in a large scale study of the *Power and Democracy in Denmark*, media scholar Anker Brink Lund asserted that outside the news media circles, news media was often described as *the fourth estate*, which should not only be critical of political power and how it was exercised, but that also required that the news media had independent political authority. This authority then encompassed political responsibility of the news media, which collided with journalistic ideals of objectivity and neutrality. In his argument, Brink Lund stated that the news media had been caught in a paradoxical bind: On the one hand, news media might have seemed all powerful, with independent journalists and complete editorial autonomy, while on the other hand, it was perceived as powerless, dependent of external financial sources, and not least, paying audiences. Following Brink Lund on this point, the news media increasingly became professionalized. Public debates had become institutionalized practices with a focus on the national arena where political actors fought to set the political agenda. Adding to this perspective, Brink Lund noted, that political power is not a matter of possession, but is an ongoing relational fight between political actors (Lund, 2004).

The three major national print newspapers are *Politiken*, *Jyllands-Posten*, and *Berlingske*. National newspapers have a daily readership of an estimated 1.5 million readers combined, including the two tabloid papers, *Ekstra Bladet* and *B.T.* The national readership has been declining consistently in the past years. The same development is true for local newspapers, which in the last year have lost more than 100.000 readers,

### **The Internet and Social Media**

Cabled high speed broadband is available in most of Denmark, and for the past decade there has been a substantial increase in broad band connections. Currently, overall connections are at a stable high level with more than ninety-five percent of the Danes access the Internet weekly through cabled broad band connections. Adding to this, the Agency for Culture and Palaces has registered a rise in smartphone mobile access to the Internet, from fifty-nine percent in 2013 to eighty-two percent in 2018. Moreover, Danes access via other gadgets, like laptops or tablet, have been stable, and thus the overall number of Danes, who access the Internet using mobile platforms has increased from seventy-three percent in 2013 to eighty-eight percent in 2018 (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019b).

## Social Media Use

In 2016, a report surveying social media use and political engagement in Denmark found that Danes had adopted social media quickly, in particular Facebook, and that social media had “become an integral part of everyday life” (Rossi et al., 2016). Statistical survey reports on the adoption and use of social media platforms will show that there has been a continuous rise over the years, yet at the same time, the same reports are very useful for comparative or longitudinal research. The reports use varying measurements and metrics, e.g., by different age ranges (from age 12, between 16 and 89, or between 15 and 75), the definition and inclusion of different types and number of social media platforms are sketchy, and often the study of the platforms are based on either daily, weekly, or monthly use. This makes it difficult to compare the actual use of social media platforms over time. The most coherent longitudinal statistics is the general use of social media in Denmark supplied by Statistics Denmark from 2011 to 2019 (Lauterbach, 2015; Tassy, 2016, 2016, 2018, 2018; Tassy et al., 2019; Wijas-Jensen, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014), which is seen in the graph below.

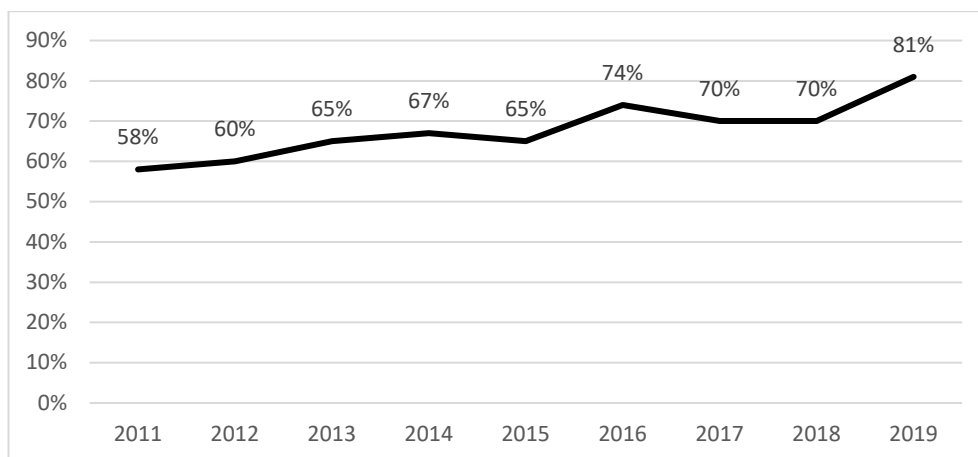


Figure 1: General use of social media platforms in Denmark 2011 – 2019.

In general, however, there is agreement among the different reports that Facebook is the largest and most widely used social media platform in Denmark. In reports from the Agency for Culture and Palaces, Facebook was described as the most popular social network site among the Danish population in 2015. Then it was estimated that 59% of the Danish population in between the age of 16 and 89 was using Facebook, 15% were using Instagram, and 11% were using Twitter (Kulturstyrelsen, 2015). In the corresponding report from 2019, the agency estimated that 85% of the Danish population from age 12 was using social media platforms, and that 77,2% of the population was present on Facebook.

In 2019, the Agency for Culture and Palaces described Facebook as the largest and most dominating among social media (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019b, p. 46). The report also showed that, not surprisingly, the younger Danes were the most active users of social media platforms. In general, among the users of social media platforms many were active on several social media platforms. 14% of the users of social media were using 7 to 9 platforms, 14% were using 6 platforms, 17% were using 5 platforms, 17% were using 4 platforms, 16% were using 3 platforms, 13% were using 2 platforms, and only 9% were using just one platform. This suggests that there is a high degree of media multiplexity among Danish social media users, where social relations are maintained on several platforms. The most popular platforms were Facebook (77,2%), Facebook Messenger (69%), Snapchat (43%), Instagram (42%), LinkedIn (39%), Google+ (39%), Pinterest (23%), Twitter (21%), and Tumblr (5%). In the 2011 annual media report from DR Audience Research, Facebook had reached 2.7 million users in Denmark. The platform was then described as “the dominating social network” (Thunø, 2011, p. 46). In the report for 2019, it was assessed that “the proportion of Danes on Facebook was steadily high”, but also that the number of daily active users had declined (Christensen, 2019).

### **Social Media and the News**

Like many countries in the world, in Denmark there is a deep tension between broadcast news media and social media platforms. One reason for this tension is the shifting advertising in the media markets, where social media platforms are gaining market shares while mass news media are losing market shares. Another reason for the tension is the growing use of social media platforms and the declining consumption of news media.

Some people get their news on social media platforms. But news is not the main attraction on social media platforms, and Danes seem to be less interested in engaging with news content on social media platforms. In a survey from DECIDIS on democratic participation via digital media in 2017, 54% of the respondents indicated that they read news content on social media platforms. For a large majority of young people social media platforms were the main source of their news consumption, but they were less interested in engaging, i.e., sharing and commenting, with news content than the total average of the population. The survey showed that only 19% shared news content and 17% commented on news content on social media platforms. The most active age group engaged in news content were Danes between 40 and 49 years of age; 32% shared news content on social media platforms and 29% commented on news (Stald et al., 2019).

These finding corresponds with other studies of the Danes use of social media for news. In 2019, the yearly survey in the Reuters Digital News Report showed that 80% of the Danes accessed news from online media, 65% responded that television was their source of news, whereas 45% stated that social media were their source of news, and only 22% got their news in print. The engagement with news content was remarkably low. The survey showed that 19% shared news content on social media platforms, and only 12% commented on news content social media platforms (Newman, 2019).

### Media Markets

The Danish media system has experienced a growing tension between public service media and private media in the past decades. The newspaper industry has lived through a constant decline in volumes and readerships, as well as in income from advertising. Television viewing has decreased slightly, but commercial television has had a small, but stable growth in terms of advertising. Social media platforms have altered and increased this tension. Following deregulation, an increased Americanization of Danish media, including commercialisation, competition, and fragmentation of news media in Denmark, have all added to the mediatization of Danish politics. Between 1980 and 2000, the structural and institutional changes that precede or cause mediatization all took place in Denmark, that is, a decline of class politics, professionalization of political parties, increasing levels of horse-race journalism, increasing media commercialization, and intensified competition for media audiences. Thus, Danish politics are mediatized to a considerable extent.

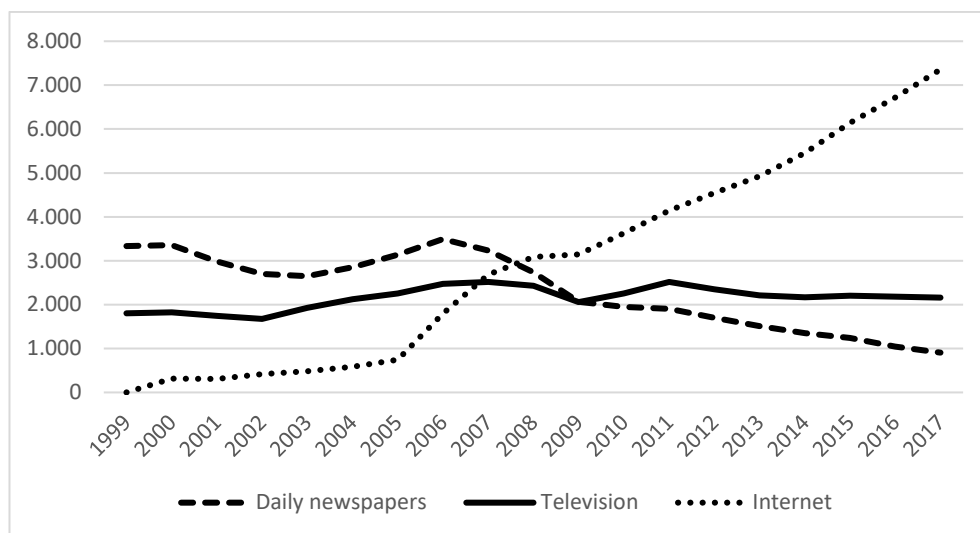


Illustration 3: Ad turnover in the Danish media market 1999 – 2017. Units in million Danish Kroner. Source Danske Medier: Reklameforbrugsundersøgelsen i Danmark and Statistics Denmark, <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/KVUNYH01>

In recent years, foreign companies, mainly Google and Facebook, have been gaining market shares in Danish advertisement. In 2018, the foreign companies increased their share to sixty-one percent of the Internet advertisement market turnover, and the total share of foreign companies of the turnover of the Danish advertisement market rose to thirty-five percent (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019a).

In general, there is a complicated relationship between privately owned media – supported by public money – and public service media, funded by public money. Adding to the tension between different media types, television, radio, magazines, and newspapers, are the new digital media and formats for radio and podcasting, news online on websites, social media, and mainly streaming services like Netflix, HBO, Amazon, and YouTube, but in the market are also public service media and public libraries.

The competition in the Danish news media market has become even more diverse with the rise of the so-called *junk media*. In a Danish context, junk media often run political biased news stories, and frequently, these news stories are mixed with commercialized news content. Currently, there are only a few junk media outlets, *24Nyt*, *NewSpeek*, *Folkets Avis*, *Den Korte Avis*, *Dagens.dk*, and *Nyheder24*. To varying degrees, they seem to lean to the right of the political spectrum.

Adding to the changes within the media system, there has been a renaissance of official party media in recent years. Two parties, The Red Gren Alliance and the Alternative, have experimented with media formats, like podcasts and blogs. Two parties, the Social Democratic Party and the Danish Peoples Party, are closely related to two online news media, which in form resemble other mainstream online news media, and both publications have joined the independent press council. Leading members of the Social Democratic Party have been instrumental in the creation of the online news media *Netavisen Pio*, named after one of the founders of the party, Louis Pio. The publication was intended to be the voice of the party (Geist, 2018). *Netavisen Pio* claims journalistic independence, yet at the same time it is committed to the ideology and values of democratic socialism, much like the Social Democratic Party. The Danish Peoples Party has created and funded the online news media *ditoverblik.dk*. The party is explicitly the named as the publisher, but the media claims that it is independent of the party. Finally, all parties have run different types of internal party media, ranging from newsletters to party magazines or papers, that were printed exclusively for party members. Today, these forms of party media are made accessible for the public as well since they are distributed electronically as well.



### **Social Media Use for Politics**

Part of the conventional wisdom about social media platforms is that people use the platforms for discussing politics. Social media are often referred to as the modern town hall, where people meet to exchange political views and opinions on important matters. People do that, but less than many think, and when it happens, it depends on the context, the social sphere, and the timing. In a survey by made by the research initiative DECIDIS in 2015, the researchers found that 59% never discussed politics with strangers, 31% did so rarely, while 10% responded that they engaged in political discussions on social media frequently (Rossi et al., 2016, p. 4). In a similar survey the following year, 72,3% responded that they never discussed politics on social media platforms. Curiously, when people were confronted while discussing politics or news on Facebook, 62.3% affirmed they learned something new and 29% sometimes changed their opinion (Rossi, 2017).

In 2011, a survey from KMD Analyse (Langager, 2011), a research department in a leading Danish IT provider KMD, showed that only 9,6 percent of the Danes preferred to get political information from the candidates on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. The most preferred media channel was national broadcast television (76,3%), followed by online news media (53,1 %), printed newspapers (48,1 %), and national broadcast radio (35,5 %). The candidates and parties' webpages ranked fifth, 30,4 percent and social media sixth. In a corresponding study by KMD Analyse in 2019 (Hellmann, 2019a, 2019b) showed a similar, but also a shifting pattern. The preferred media channel was still national broadcast television (80%), followed by online news media (34%), regional television (31%), and national broadcast radio (25%). But Facebook (22%) had surpassed printed newspapers (21%) and the candidates and parties' webpages had dropped to a ninth place (12%).

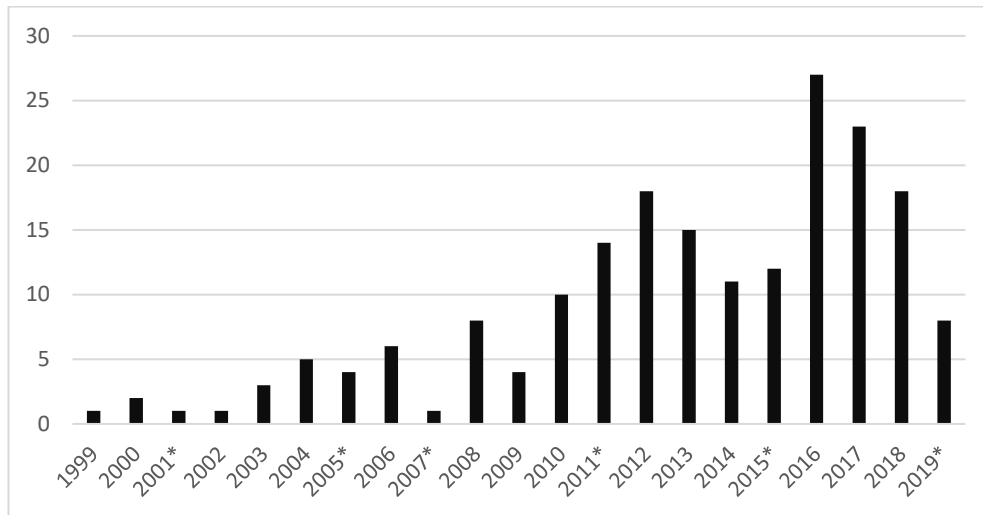
Political participation changes during elections. Following the 2011 election campaign, a survey showed that 81% of the respondents had encountered political content on social media, and 40% had actively used social media during the election campaign (Hoff et al., 2012, p. 34). Following the 2015 election campaign, a similar survey showed that 61% of the respondents had had used social media platforms for activities related to politics (Hoff et al., 2016). While political participation outside the election season may seem low, it increases when elections take place.

### **Danish Research**

For the past decades, research into how Danish politicians and parties use digital and social media in general and for agenda-setting and campaigning seems to be fragmented in scope, sparsely layered, and limited to handful of

researchers working within a disjointed research field. Adding to this it seems that researchers have had a hard time keeping up with the constant changes within the field, as well as having difficulties of establishing a comprehensive Danish research tradition and volume of research. The overall focus of Danish research is, not surprisingly, on national politics, the party leaders, members of parliament, parties, as well as the citizens use of the Internet and social media platforms during national election campaigns. The initial research agendas explored how the Internet could revitalise participatory politics and democracy, but research agendas have faded away and have been replaced by research into the electoral effects of social media platforms. The social media platforms receiving the most attention to that end are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, whereas platforms like YouTube, LinkedIn, Reddit, and Snapchat are virtually absent in current research. When it comes to the use of digital and social media in local and regional politics, European politics, or national referendums, Danish research is just barely scratching the surface.

In terms of volume, the Danish research output has grown steadily over the past decades, often with contributions increasing significantly in the year following a national election. As part of my research, approximately 200 studies, which in a broad sense captures Danish studies of political use of the Internet and social media platforms, in the shape of research articles, reports or books were identified and compiled, as shown in the diagram below.



*Illustration 4: Research in the use of the Internet and social media in Danish politics 1999 to 2019. N = 191. Years marked with an asterisk were election years.*

Obviously, volume matters. As research continues to grow, it suggests a widening of the research field and it indicates that more scholars are contributing to the field. The initial low volume should, however, not be conflated with lack of interest in or depth of the field, rather, the initial studies should be regarded as major contributions in their own rights, but also as

significant studies as part of broader research into the state of contemporary society. This was certainly the case in the first major study of Denmark as an information society, which was part of an extensive government commissioned interdisciplinary study of political power conducted around the millennium, known as the *Danish Democracy and Power Study*. A large group of researchers participated in the study with a range of contributions on the use of the Internet and information and communication technologies in Denmark, which in many respects reflected research agendas on power and democracy found in contemporary research in other countries, and not surprising, the findings were similar to findings elsewhere, as the study mirrored the conventions of the day, that the Internet had a democratic potential (Hoff, 2004).

A larger volume may suggest an intensified focus on societal change because of the rise of digital and social media, as well as of increased technological innovation of the political campaigns in Denmark. But just as social media platforms have spiralled into many directions over the last decade, research have become more diversified. Adding to this, current research in political communication is often limited to certain niches of political communication, specific interplays between converging media forms or types, single case studies of social media platforms used as communication tools, and often these studies are founded on an understanding of digital or social media platforms contextualized within sociotechnical constructions, with little reference to actual political life in Denmark.

Regarding volume, the main bulk research included go beyond the scope of my project. For a substantial part of the included research, the overall focus is not on formal politics, e.g., elections or elected politicians, but on politics understood in a broader sense, as in the politics of social movements (Neumayer & Stald, 2014), identity politics, or populism on social media, or a very specific sense, as in the relations between journalism and politics, with the weight placed on journalism (Blach-Ørsten & Aagaard, 2018). While these areas often are related to formal politics because of their related topicality, they rarely contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital and social media platforms are used within formal politics.

Furthermore, depending on the more specific disciplinary fields, the study of social media, campaigning and political communication are approached very differently. That is the case within political science, where there seems to division between scholars on one side, who are of the conviction that electioneering and campaigning do not determine the outcome of elections (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2008), and scholars who, on the other side, have studied the Danish parties use of the Internet, notably among those are the

comparative studies on *cyber-campaigning* (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2012) and *Elections in Cyberspace* (Møller Hansen et al., 2006), and researchers have also been exploring the impact of individual politicians' use social media in elections, finding that social media platforms were used as campaigning tools in line with other forms of election media, but also that voting in local elections was indeed influenced by social media (Elklit et al., 2017) as well as in the 2015 election for the Danish parliament (Møller Hansen & Stubager, 2017).

### **A Chronological Review of Research**

When reviewing the Danish research since the mid-1990s to 2006, it seems at first glance limited, fragmented, and detached from political realities of the day, and moreover a substantial part of the research rarely considered social media to be a research area in its own rights, but more as a minor subset of campaigning tools or add-ons to journalism studies.

In the first studies of Internet use in Danish politics, research largely reflected assumptions and perspectives found in contemporary international research. In the first major study on the use of information and communication technologies in Danish elections, researchers sought to explore the Internet's democratic potential within an independent experimental research framework created for the elections, rather than examining actual use among parties and politicians (Löfgren et al., 1999).

In the following years, researchers succeeded in contextualizing the use of information and communication technologies in Danish politics, like in the comprehensive *Danish Democracy and Power Study*. In a number of studies, Linaa Jensen explored citizens' participation in online political discussions (Linaa Jensen, 2003), that is how on one side, the process of globalization caused a loss of political influence among citizens, but on the other side provided them new possibilities for gaining information and communicating with politicians on the Internet (J. L. Jensen, 2003).

And in a major interdisciplinary research project on media developments in modern society, organized by the Center for Media and Democracy in the Network Society (MODINET), researchers explored the significance of globalization and the impact of new digital media on politics, society and democracy from 2002 to 2005. Among the results, Klaus Bruhn Jensen found that in less than a decade, the Internet had become part of everyday life, websites had become interfaces to culture and resources for political participation, and while that was possibly the source of change, challenging societal structures, but also that existing institutions shaped the use of the Internet (K. B. Jensen, 2005). In 2005, researchers explored how information and communication technologies influenced local and regional politics in

select Danish municipalities. The research ranged from the use of new networked digital media in local elections, but also addressed democratic innovation and citizens participation, as well as political communication in a broader sense (Hoff & Storgaard, 2005). In a book from 2007, *New Publics with/out Democracy* (Bang, 2007), researchers from different disciplines offered different, but comprehensive perspectives on the transformation of the public sphere and political communication in network society.

Among the early studies of Danish parties' use of digital media, Karl Löfgren found that the party use of the Internet did not revolutionize party politics or organizational form, but it did add to the concurrent professionalization of the Danish parties. In most parties, the Internet were regarded as yet another set of administrative tools which could be used inform voters. Only in a few members based parties, Internet services, including Bulletin Board Services, were used for internal party communication and as a participatory possibility for party members. In parties with a more elitist attitude and approach to the voters, the Internet was thought of as a campaign tool (Löfgren, 2004). Similarly, in examining the parties' role in campaigning for the 2005 national election, Kosiara-Pedersen found that while parties did spend many resources on campaigning, they did not integrate online and offline campaigning (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2012).

The candidates use of social media in the 2005 elections were explored by Klastrup and Pedersen, who studied how blogs were integrated into personal campaigns as a new form of online political communication, that facilitated social interaction between politicians and citizens. But instead of interacting with the public, the study found, that candidates used blogs for communication to the public in a personal and informal way (Klastrup & Pedersen, 2005).

From 2006 to the national election in 2011, more attention was paid to the growing field of social media platforms in political communication within the field of formal politics. Part of the explanation for the growing interest was the overall rise of the use of social media platforms, but another was the use of social media in the campaigns in the 2008 US election, wherein Barack Obama campaign's use of Facebook and Twitter are thought of as a gamechanger in political communication as well as with research. And while often mirroring research agendas elsewhere, social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, increasingly became part of Danish research.

In an explorative study of the use of social media as relationship marketing tools prior to the 2011 national election, Højholt and Kosiara-Pedersen found that although the members of parliament used social media like Facebook, the

use appeared to be more of a personal nature rather than political motivated (Højholt & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2011).

Following the 2007 national election, an election study was launched by Jens Hoff, Jakob Linaa Jensen, and Lisbeth Klastrup (2008). Among the findings was that politicians and parties were primarily using web 1.0 communications technologies, mainly websites, for campaigning, but also that some of the candidates, including most party leaders and elite politicians, were using blogs and found their way to social media platforms like MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube. As it turned out, the study was the first in a series of interdisciplinary election research reports combining political science, media and cultural studies on the use of digital and social media in Danish national elections.

By the 2011 national election, blogging had waned, personal homepages were virtually gone, whereas candidates use of social media platforms, and in particular Facebook, had increased considerably. All party leaders and leading candidates were now actively using Facebook in their campaigns, and smaller segment of the candidates - mostly elite politicians - had begun using Twitter. In a sense the increased use of social media platforms by candidates reflected a sharp increase in use of social media platforms by Danes between the general election in 2007 and the general election in 2011. As such, candidates used social media in the election to bypass traditional news media, and to reach and engage voters directly to inform them of their political agenda (Hoff et al., 2012).

In a post-election study of leading politicians use of Facebook pages in the general election, Sander Schwartz examined the interactions between the politicians with citizens and found that Facebook pages were used as marketing platforms, helped mobilizing supporters, connected politicians and citizens, and enabled public feedback on the politicians Facebook pages. As such, while the Facebook pages seemed to benefit the politicians, public interactions also forced them to give up some control of their strategic communication. Politicians engagement with citizens with shared views could lead to stronger partisanship and loyalty, whereas citizens who engaged in critical debates could lead to discussions with polar positions between politicians and citizens, but also among citizens (Schwartz, 2015).

The Danish news media was still playing significant role for candidates standing for the 2011 national election. Based on a survey among candidates, Skovsgaard and Van Dalen found that for most candidates, traditional mass media were still the most important channels to the voters, but among thirty percent of the candidates, social media were considered very important communication channels. Correspondingly, social media, i.e. Facebook, were

ranked as the fourth most important channel for campaigns, following regional television and regional and local newspapers. Overall, the candidates mainly used social media to by-pass traditional mass media and communicate directly with the voters, and that social media were more prominent in the intra-party competition among the candidates (Skovsgaard & Van Dalen, 2013).

In June 2014, Mads P. Sørensen researched the elected politicians' presence on and use of social media in between elections. Using a quantitative mapping of the Danish members of parliament's presence on social media platforms, Sørensen found that a large number of MPs were present on Twitter and almost all on Facebook. The majority of politicians used the platforms for informing citizens, but majority did not engage in the political conversation activities following updates (Sørensen, 2016).

Curiously, among Danes use seems to reflect that of politicians, and as such, it was far from all who participated in political discussions on social media platforms outside of election, even though a large minority was engaged in online discussions frequently (Rossi, 2017; Rossi et al., 2016).

By the 2015 general election, social media platforms had gained popularity among politicians, where 91 percent of candidates standing for the election used Facebook to communicate with voters, who had continued to adopt social media for their everyday practices, including staying informed of current news and politics. As part of the election survey, 61 percent of the participants said they had used digital media to search for political information and engaged with political content on social media. Moreover, Danish television stations dedicated substantial resources covering the online election campaigns. Social media platforms had matured and become a stable part of political culture in digital society (Hoff et al., 2016).

Following the 2015 general election, a study based on interviews with the parties social media managers about the practices of the Danish parties on social media platforms by Farkas and Schwartz (2018) found that there were four primary functions of the platforms, which the parties social media generally engaged with. First, they monitored user activities on party social media platforms, Secondly, they used content moderation, including removing user content and blocking users from commenting. Third, they took part in replying to users, i.e., handling the reciprocal communications between political parties and users. Finally, they engaged with users' ability to influence the "decision-making processes associated with the political parties". In the electoral context, the study found that the parties' social media managers primary interests were user-generated content, as a means of distribution since it could increase the reach of political posts.

The 2015 general election was not only a turning point for the established politicians and parties, and their use of social media. A new party, the *Alternative*, had achieved electoral success, by proposing a different approach to political issues and organization altogether (Husted, 2015). New parties tend to attract media attention in elections, but this time the new party also benefitted from the use of digital and social media in their political communication, as an organizational element, and as a way to articulate new political ideas among the party members (Husted & Hansen, 2017).

Following the 2015 election, new perspectives and technology have entered the research field. In recent years, researchers have studied hybrid politicians (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017), explored the interplay between news media and the Danish politicians and parties, closely related to institutional logic and news media logic (Blach-Ørsten & Aagaard, 2018), and Valeriani and Vaccari have studied dual screening (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2018) as well as mobile instant messaging services, MIMS, and informal talk about politics (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2018). Furthermore, in recent years, Danish research have seen an increase of new perspectives and a range of different approaches have contributed to the study of social media platforms and politics. In 2017, Birckbak set out to explore networks using actor network theory as an approach to study single issues in politics on social media platforms (Birckbak, 2017), and in 2018, he explored shitstorms, filter bubbles and public spheres (Birckbak, 2018). Using digital sociology as the starting point and pushing back established research traditions within media studies, including media logic, Madsen and Munk experiment with data-publics, platforms, and political practices (Madsen & Munk, 2019).

Today, social media have become a mundane part of everyday life in Denmark. Like citizens in other European countries, Danes increasingly get their news on social media, with Facebook as their preferred social media platform in terms of news consumption (Newman et al., 2017), and as the platform most widely used (Runge, 2016, 2017).

But even if the use of social media have become mundane in Danish society, research into the use of digital and social media in politics was still in 2017 characterized as “emerging” (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017). This seems to be the case. There are signs of an expanding research field. Volume is up, yet most studies are substantially smaller, often testing for the effects of specific cases of the use of a platform, addressing a specific political issue or event, or exploring evolving research methods or tools. Adding to this, for the most part, these are either studies of how media are used and what media are doing to people, not on how the use of digital and social media do to society and that means for society. Correspondingly, as the field expands, researchers



now must cover a far more diversified research field, new digital methods, as well as new types of media and technologies, but this happens with approximately the same number of researchers – or less – that worked within the field, when it was significantly smaller than it is today. In the Danish Democracy and Power Study and MODINET, forty researchers contributed to those two projects alone. Had it not been for the recurring studies of digital and social media platforms in Danish elections by Hoff, Linaa Jensen, Klastrup and Schwartz, as well as a few, collaborative research projects, current research achievements would seem to be the result of the enterprises undertaken by individual researchers, and research on the use of social media in Danish politics would be completely fragmented and bordering on non-existing.

### **Conclusions**

While research in the use of digital and social media in the general elections are important and necessary achievements, and despite the contributions research have made in the past decade, much more research across academic disciplines is needed to fill the large gaps of knowledge in Danish research.

As it is, we are barely scratching the surface – and this is just considering research into politics on a national level. When it comes to second order elections, local politics, or European politics, the field has virtually been left uncharted and deserted for almost two decades. In some cases, we are clueless. No one has studied the effects digital and social media on political life in Greenland and the Faroe Islands, and we do not even have the most basic knowledge of how digital and social media have impacted that part of society. We need more knowledge of how politicians and parties use social media in everyday political life, in second order elections, i.e., local and regional elections and elections for the European Parliament, as well as in referendums. Continuous and comprehensive research is needed.

Research may be growing slowly in volume, but it is still fragmented, often ad hoc, and only a limited number of scholars are participating in the continuous elections research.

The field needs a coherent history, and most of all, it needs depth, breadth, and substance, which can help us understand the wider impact of digital and social media platforms on Danish politics and society.

The field acutely needs an interdisciplinary research tradition, and it requires coordination across disciplines. I hope to fill some of the gaps with this thesis, but future research needs far more resources and research to provide the full story.

## 4. Research Design and Digital Methods

In the previous chapters, I outlined the foundations for the thesis project, which takes the form of a mapping of political life in Denmark on social media platforms, and the theoretical framework of the thesis, in which I argue that we see a new form of social interaction that takes place on social media platforms with distinct media logics and thus contributes to an increased mediatization of politics. Then I positioned the thesis within the context of Danish political culture, the media system, and the political system, and within the previous Danish research in social media and politics.

In this chapter, I set out addressing the research design for the thesis, which includes a basic outline of the research model. Then I explore the case selection, as well as the ethical aspects. In the second part of the chapter, I outline the methods used throughout the work with the empirical cases of the thesis. This part includes considerations regarding data collection and analysis.

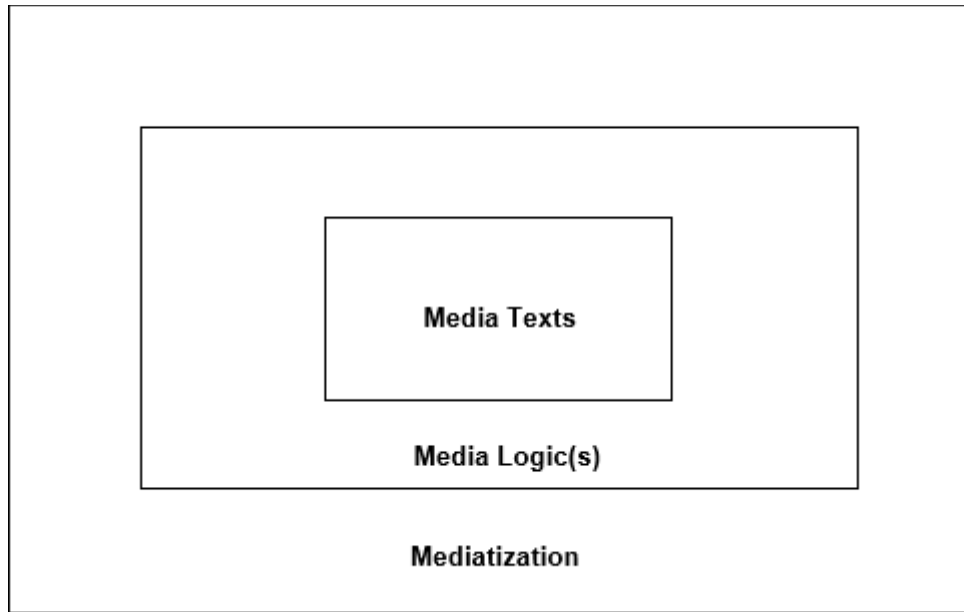
### Research Design

The research design in the thesis applies a complementary strategy of using different methods to support the research framework, which is based on theories on how political communication is structured by social media logics and how that can be understood as a transformative rationality which adds to the mediatization of politics. As part of this model, the thesis includes theories on political agenda-setting and online campaigning.

In all three empirical cases in the thesis, my research approach is based on a basic, but dynamic model of communication on social media platforms. At the centre of the model is the communication of *media texts*, which here refers to the variety of content types posted to the platforms, e.g., texts, photos, videos, that is broadly understood as the posting of meaningful, semantic information to social media platforms. As such these media texts can be analysed and understood as individual acts of mediation.

At the next level of the model are different and competing forms of media logic, such as news media logic, network media logic, hybrid media logic, and social media logic. These forms of media logic represent different formats and rules, which structure interaction within specific logics and the exchanges between the different types of media logic and forms of communication. Unlike the semantic information, i.e., content such as texts, photos, or videos, posted to social media platforms, the data generated by social media logic are both semantic data and metadata. The final level of the model is used to show

how users interact with data posted to the social media platforms. The data from this level is mostly metadata, which should be regarded as the expressions of cultural and social interactions, and eventually, as a conceptualisation of how the processes of mediatization play out on social media platforms.



*The basic analytical framework..*

The analytical framework has served as the guiding frame for the empirical studies in my thesis, since it allowed me to approach research on different levels, where the starting point could be the analysis of individual media texts, the exploration of social media logic, or the study of the mediatization of politics. As such, the analytical framework guided me to approach the empirical cases with different mixed methods for the mapping the field, a mixed methods approach, I have found to be important for two reasons.

First of all, the interdisciplinary, mixed methods approach, as proposed by e.g., Karpf, Kreiss, Nielsen, & Powers (2015), Rogers in *Digital Methods* (2015), or Marres in *Digital Sociology* (2017), seems to be a sensible way to approach large scale studies of digital political communication, where the aim is to understand the transformative nature of change in society, not just to understand the effects of the use of a social media platform. This, however, does not mean that different forms of studies, quantitative as well as qualitative should be discarded. They still provide important knowledge along with a variety of methods, which can be used to understand societal change and the processes of that change and the impact on digital political communication (Drotner & Mosberg Iversen, 2017; Larsson, 2015; Weller et al., 2013).

Secondly, I subscribe to the principles formulated by Rogers (2015), in which digital methods are used to study and repurpose digital objects, or artefacts, in order to follow the evolving methods of the medium for social and cultural research, and following this, using digital methods for building on top of dominant devices, thus making derivative results from the results as well as grounding digital methods in social life. These principles not only offer a methodological based research frame, but they also offer coherent and usable methods for data collection as well as for analysis.

In this perspective, digital methods are not a matter of collecting static data from platforms. It becomes a research practice, in which the researcher strives to follow the evolving methods of the medium. As part of this practice, the researcher not only thinks with online devices, but takes stock of availability and exploitability of digital objects, to recombine them. Furthermore, the researcher involves the challenges of using and grounding data (on/offline) for social research.

### **Case selection**

In practical terms, the thesis is based on three empirical cases exploring different aspects of political communication. The first case, *Governing with Social Media*, is partly an introduction to the Members of Parliaments' everyday use of social media in political communication in Denmark, with a focus on party leaders. In the second case, *Breaking the Agenda*, I explore how two different types of politicians, the elite politician and the populist fringe politician, use social media platforms to set the political agenda in Danish politics. The primary focus is on the use of live streaming video. Finally, in the last case, *Danish Elections and Campaigning*, I unfold how social media platforms have been used for campaigning in the general elections in 2011, 2015, and 2019. For all the cases, I use data collected from social media platforms.

As part of my research practice, I have tried to embrace methods which secure the validity and reliability of the thesis. Consequently, in relation to the presentation of each case I outline the specific methods used; and data is supplied as appendixes to verify and test the results and replicate the findings in the thesis.

The three cases are different in substance, but they also differ in contexts and time. The first case focuses on politics from 2010 to 2019, primarily with the focus on the month of October, and mainly with the post of the party leaders. The second case centres on observations from more specific periods of time; the first part pivots around August 2016 and the second part is from the early months in 2019 to the general election later in the same year. The last case

engages with the short election campaigns leading to the general elections in 2011, 2015, and 2019.

In general, we need to be careful in our research, when we talk about the Internet and social media, and we need to consider the data we collect. I like to think of data as artefacts – they are fragile, they decay, they are sometimes ephemeral, or at least they seem so from a research perspective, and they sometimes become inaccessible. Although Internet research is not archaeology, we must be acutely aware of the aspect of time. First, in developing his concept of Internet time, Karpf reminds us that the “Internet of 2008 is different from the Internet of 1996, 2000, or 2004, and this is a recurrent, ongoing pattern” (Karpf, 2012, p. 645). This is true. In terms of this thesis, Facebook today is different from Facebook in 2011.

It is also important to remember that contexts change. Everything surrounding the use of social media platforms for political purposes has changed as well. Bearing that in mind, it would be wrong to claim that social interactions online are the same today as ten years ago. As it is, it is a central part of my argument that the process of change is due to new affordances of social media logic and an increased mediatization. This process is a function of time and changing contexts.

### **Research Ethics**

Time and contexts are ethical aspects we need to consider when we research social media and politics. Statements made at a different time or made in a different context require constant awareness. This is a constant ethical challenge when researching media over a longer period of time.

The collection and use of data from social media platforms present researchers with a string of challenges for securing their projects’ integrity and viability on the one hand, and on the other, the safeguarding of users to avoid exposing or causing harm to individual users of social media platforms (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016; Rogers, 2018). This requires extraordinary and explicit consideration on the behalf of the researcher, who should conduct research transparently and openly.

In collecting data from social media platforms, it has been important for me to adhere to the terms and services of the platforms as a minimum standard, and as an ongoing process, to collect and secure data storage in accordance with the rules of the Danish Data Protection Agency, as well as consulting the basic rules of the Danish code of conduct for research integrity (Danmark & Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2014).

In dealing with politicians or political issues, this become critically important, since we are dealing with sensitive information regarding the user’s political

beliefs. For ordinary users it may be hard to draw a clear line between what is public and what is private, and obviously, politicians are people too, but they are also politicians, who are very much aware of when, where, and how they communicate. Still, as a researcher it is necessary to make distinctions between when and where specific data are relevant. One distinction, which I have made in this thesis is that no data is used from personal accounts, e.g., from Facebook profiles rather than Facebook pages, unless they were specifically intended for political purposes.

### **Digital methods**

In this thesis, the focus on data collected from social media platforms. This data has been gathered from a variety of sources, with different methods applied, e.g., surveys, observations, or data collection from the social media platforms. As such, my own primary data collection has involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. Exactly which methods have been applied will be presented as part of the case study chapters.

Apart from the primary data collection, I have used a variety of secondary data sources throughout the thesis to explore or supplement specific cases, or to add context to the case. Among the sources for the general media development in Denmark, I have used data from The Agency for Culture and Palaces, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's annual reporting on the use of electronic media in Denmark, and the annual Digital News Reports by The Reuters Institute at Oxford University and Roskilde University. General statistics mainly comes from Statistics Denmark, and election data, surveys, and statistics from KMD Valg (contracted by the Danish Government to produce voting statistics), SurveyBanken from the department of Political Science at Aalborg University, the Danish Election Database from the Institute for Political Science at Aarhus University, and the Danish National Election Study from the department of Political Science at Aarhus University.

### **Data Collection**

The collection of data from social media platforms have, for the better part, improved significantly in the past years. In practical terms, most social media platforms afford access to user data through their application programming interfaces, API, albeit with some limitations even if you pay for access. Consequently, there has been a strong preference among researchers for single platform studies, rather than comprehensive studies (Rogers, 2019). Unsurprisingly, data is a commodity in digital society, and it is usually offered directly by the platforms or through vendors, who have access to the platforms data firehoses, e.g. Twitter (Weller et al., 2013). Accompanying the access, most platforms offer technical information on how to collect data, often through the social media's developer pages, e.g. Facebook's developer

pages (*Facebook for Developers*, 2018) or Twitter's (*Twitter Developer Platform — Twitter Developers*, 2018).

Apart from exploring and using various methods to gain access to and collect data from social media, e.g., via the platforms' APIs, scraping resources, manual collection, and data from third data collectors and vendors, it is possible to produce a comprehensive and nuanced set of data on the use of social media for political purposes, when it is mixed with surveys, observations, field work, and interviews. In collecting data from a range of social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube, I have used a variety of methods depending on the platform and the desired data, but for the sake of brevity, I will only outline the applied methods for collecting data from Facebook and Twitter.

As for data collection on Facebook, I accessed the platform via its Graph API to collect data, e.g., status updates, comments, and interactions from Facebook pages for different purposes. In relation to national politics, I tracked approximately 300 accounts mainly belonging to Danish politicians and candidates for more than two years via the Graph API. It is, however, limited to Facebook Pages and no other forms of presence on Facebook, such as personal profiles or communities, e.g., individual groups or page communities. Obviously, this is a limit to the automated data collection, since it either require dedicated scrapers, or manual collection if that kind of data is needed for research, which is time consuming. Often, however, it is sensible or even necessary to collect data manually from Facebook, and as such, it has been a standard practice throughout the data collection for this thesis, e.g., in identifying candidates or local party branches. As a supplementary way of collecting data from Facebook, I have used the Netvizz app (Rieder, 2013a, 2013b) and monitoring services, e.g. Fanpage Karma (Uphill, 2018) and Quintly (Quintly, 2018), either for confirmation of the data I have collected or for additional collection.

Data collection on Twitter is in many ways a simpler operation, since the platform, unlike Facebook, only operates with one type of accounts, and once you are granted access to the platforms' API, you can collect data from all public users, within the limitations set by Twitter. In practical terms, I have accessed and collected data via the Twitter API for a year. Besides that data collection, I have also used DMI's Twitter Capture and Analysis Toolset, DMI-TCAT (Borra & Rieder, 2014), through the installation at the IT University of Copenhagen, as well as NodeXL (Hansen et al., 2012; *NodeXL - CodePlex Archive*, 2018; Smith et al., 2009), for minor or specific data collection tasks.

In the second case, I have used data collected from YouTube, since it was the primary platform for Rasmus Paludan and the party Hard Line. For the data collection, I used the Digital Methods Initiative's YouTube Data Tools (Borra, 2015; Rieder, 2015) during and after the election campaign. With the tool it was easy to collect the metadata from YouTube, but individual videos still had to be saved. Adding to the challenge was that Hard Line's YouTube channel was closed in February 2020 (Ritzau, 2020), thus making data collection impossible.

After the collection of data, the next step of the process is the data analysis, or the repurposing of the collected data. There are several minor issues that still need to be explored and tested, but the major concern of the analysis has been the constant change of the social media platforms logics, and as such, what the platforms afford users as well as researchers in terms of data. This is an example of Karpf's *Internet time* (Karpf, 2012). A couple of examples of a major change of affordances offered by a platform could be Twitter's change of the number of characters in a tweet from 140 characters to 280 (Rosen, 2017), or the introduction of the possibility to transmit live streaming video from ordinary users on Facebook (Lavrusik, 2016). Just as social media platforms frequently introduce new functionalities of the platforms, they remove others. In November 2015, Twitter replaced the icon used for indicating no other than a certain tweet was added to a user's favourites, from a star to a heart, but for future reference *favourites* would be referred to as *likes* (Akik, 2015). For users of social media platforms there is a huge difference between how a *favourite* or a *like* should be perceived for an individual tweet, thus leading to speculation and possible trouble among users (Andersen, 2018), and ambiguity for researchers (Hayes et al., 2016).





*Illustration 1: Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen post on Facebook and Instagram, October 12, 2019.*

## 5.1 Governing with Social Media

This case, *Governing with Social Media*, serves as an introduction to the field of digital political communication in Denmark, and it is mainly about how the Danish Members of Parliament's use social media outside elections, how they have adapted to social media logic and eventually how the mediatization of politics has increased as a result. Before I dive into the empirical part of the case, I outline theories of agenda-setting as the backdrop for the case and explore the previous Danish research in everyday formal politics.

In the first part of the case, *Presence on Social Media*, I address the Members of Parliaments increased presence on and use of Facebook and Twitter from 2010 to 2019. In the second part of the case, *Taking the Lead on Social Media Platforms*, I focus on the party leaders and their use of social media in the month of October each year from 2010 to 2019. The overall point of this part of the case is to show the increasing scale of the politicians' presence on social media platforms over the years, as well as their use of platforms in everyday politics. In the last part of this case, *Image is Something*, I explore the increased use of images among the party leaders from 2010 to 2019, and how images have become important for multi-layered messaging on social media platforms, which serves to frame political issues as well as the politicians attributes.

## Agenda-setting

The paradigmatic turning point in agenda-setting research was the publication of McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study, *The agenda setting function of mass media*, in which they explored the hypothesis that *the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues*. Based on the empirical study of the voters in Chapel Hill, McCombs and Shaw's main conclusion was that the media were "the major primary sources of national political information; for most, mass media provide the best – and only – easily available approximation of ever-changing political realities". Shortly after McCombs and Shaw's study, G. R. Funkhouser's (1973) published another large-scale empirical study of agenda-setting, in which he explored how mass media handled the public issues that shaped the American public opinion in the sixties, in particular how the news media reported on the complex and shifting social realities related to these issues and major political events compared to reality<sup>1</sup>. Like McCombs and Shaw, Funkhouser found, given the condition that the news media were the "only way of knowing, *at the time*, what is happening in the world outside our immediate experience", that the "amount of media attention given to an issue strongly influences its visibility to the public". Since then, the mainstream research in agenda-setting has been understood as exploring the role of the news media in mass media in society and is based on the premise that agenda-setting is a process in which there is a "transfer of issue salience from the news media to the public agenda" (M. E. McCombs et al., 2014). As a result of the growing influence of mass media and the rising autonomy of the news media, mass media and broadcast news were perceived as the *de facto* public sphere where political actors could reach the national public, i.e., the voters, and influence public opinion at scale. To understand the significance of the agenda-setting role of mass media, research increasingly became oriented toward the agenda-setting practices of the media elites, the news selection of the gatekeepers of mass media, including the values and norms of journalists and editors, and the influence of the governing political elites, by asking the question *who sets the media agenda*, and subsequently, what determines the importance of issue salience in agenda-setting, i.e. the newsworthiness of an issue, and how does the media agenda influence the public, policy decisions, and eventually elections.

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<sup>1</sup> Funkhouser study included a comparison of news coverage with reality, but in doing so, he found that it was difficult to characterize "reality" via statistical trends. Funkhouser elaborated on this, that even if the data and his interpretations were valid, they would "tell us little except to be skeptical of the news", adding that the "news media are believed by many people (including many policymakers) to be reliable information sources, but the data presented here indicate that this is not necessarily the case. Reliance on the news media (and superficial public opinion polls) may mislead anyone who wants to know what is happening in the world and how the public really feels about it".

Agenda-setting has a prehistory that spans more than a century of developments. McCombs (2014: 3) identified Walter Lippmann as the intellectual father of agenda-setting, citing his seminal work on *Public Opinion* ([1922] 2015) as foundational. Similarly, Dearing and Rogers (1996) noted that Lippmann was among the first to postulate a relationship between the mass media agenda and the public agenda. In a previous work outlining past research, Dearing and Rogers (1988) also traced the origins of the theoretical research into agenda-setting back to Lippmann, but added an extensive list of scholarly work to the growth and development of the research area, including Lasswell's theories of political propaganda (1927) and Lazarsfeld and Merton's work on mass communication, public taste, and organized social action (1948). Dearing and Rogers (1988) argue that research in agenda-setting has two main traditions. The first and most pervasive tradition is research agenda-setting, how the media agenda influences the public agenda. The second tradition and less explored research tradition is policy agenda-setting, sometimes referred to as agenda-building, which studies how the public agenda, the media agenda, influence the policy agenda, or of how political actors' constructs agendas of political controversy to influence media coverage.

Substantial volumes have been added to agenda-setting research for the past fifty years. The basic process of agenda-setting includes multiple agendas, often these are constituted by three agendas, e.g. the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda, populated with sets of issues which are ordered by the degree of their salience. Sometimes, agenda-setting is described a layered process, with three distinct levels of agenda-setting. First level of agenda-setting is deeply entangled in traditional news media research, where the agenda-setting often has been understood as the practices of news selection and is described as the interaction between the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda, and actors within each of the agendas. Second level of agenda-setting then refers to the selection of the specific attributes of an issue from which the public will shape their opinions. The third level of agenda-setting conceives of dynamic relationship between media as they construct a networked media agenda, in which new information is mixed with old, and salience is equated to retrievability<sup>2</sup>.

One of the advances in the field was the conception of agenda-setting as a process in which, as Dearing and Rogers (1996: 1ff) argue that agenda-setting

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<sup>2</sup> There should be a short mention, and not as a footnote, that the news media have transitioned too. The newspapers of the 1960 – 1990s were physical papers and television broadcast was analogue transmissions. Today, the news media as a concept is no longer limited by physical media but have become digital. What remains are the practices, values and norms of broadcast journalism and the media elites. See also Neuman (2016: 63).

is a process, in which there is “an ongoing competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of media professionals, the public, and policy elites”. In this competition, also known as first level agenda setting, Dearing and Rogers suggest that there are three main components, the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda. Here the central agenda is the media agenda, which is organized by media gatekeepers, i.e., journalists and editors, based on institutionalized news values and norms. But news selection for the media agenda is also influenced by major news media, in a process known as intermedia agenda-setting, but also important news events and rituals, prominent politicians, and public opinion, as surveyed by polling.

Dearing and Rogers refer to an *agenda* as “a set of issues that are communicated in a hierarchy of importance at a point in time”, and they define *issues* as a “social problem, often conflictual, that has received mass media coverage”. Some issues are known as *valence issues*, where issue proponents “battle over how to solve the agreed-upon social problem and not whether a social problem exists”. Because of the conflictual nature of issues, Dearing and Rogers note that “agenda-setting is inherently a political process”. Traditionally, media scholars have been interested in the salience and transfers of issues, or of politicians and parties, but they have also engaged in researching the process of change of salience, what initiates the process, who gets to decide, which issues are on the agenda, and how do the issues reach and influence the public agenda.

Central to the study of agenda setting is then how media construct social reality. Adding to the discussion on salience, Scheufele (1999, 2000) has argued that salience is related to accessibility, understood as the “ease with which these issues can be retrieved from memory”, and that there should be made a distinction between how mass media “can influence the salience of certain issues as perceived by the audience” and what role the perceived issue salience plays when “an individual makes a judgment about a political actor”. Here, Scheufele argues, the most salient or accessible issues, or the perceived importance of issues, “in a person’s memory will most strongly influence perceptions of political actors and figures”<sup>3</sup>. The implications of this distinction are, according to Scheufele, that agenda-setting should be examined as media agendas and as audience agendas, but also that agenda-

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<sup>3</sup> Scheufele (2000) has an interesting discussion on salience as the theoretical premises of agenda-setting, priming, and framing, in which he elaborates on the distinctions to be made of salience in between sociology and psychology. XXX Takeshita (2006) adds to the discussion on several levels, importantly, he suggests that “there might be two types of agenda setting: a deliberate ‘genuine’ agenda setting involving active inference and an automatic ‘pseudo’ agenda setting explained by the accessibility bias”, in which distinctions are to be made about how information is constructed and processed, i.e. is used for persuasion.

setting needs to be examined as “three distinct processes can be differentiated: agenda-building, agenda-setting, and priming”.

In traditional news media research, agenda setting has often been realised as the practices of news selection, which in turn were related to different modes of production. In early news media theory, editors and journalists performed the role as gatekeeper, who managed the selection of news, based on a set of objective news criteria, as the news passed through the system (Lewin, 1947; White, 1950). Eventually these selection and production practises turned into journalistic norms and values in broadcast news and mass media culture, known as the news criteria. Consequentially, Bennett and Iyengar (2008) noted that “the news does tell people both what to think about ... and also how to think about it”. The selection and production processes, including the journalistic norms and values, are often described as a linear process, but McCombs (2014) describes the process as a value based, layered process between news sources, other news media, news norms, and the media agenda at the core.

If first level agenda setting is about the transmission of issue salience from the media to the public, then second level agenda setting is about the transmission of attribute salience. Following McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, and Rey (1997) second level of agenda setting, also known as attribute agenda setting, refers to the selection of the specific attributes of an issue or a political candidate from which voters will shape their own opinions. The media is not seen as dictating the voters what their opinions should be, but the media may guide what the public should think as worthy of saying about the issue or the candidate to a significant degree. Attributes can either be substantive, e.g., description of the issue’s qualities or a politician’s personality, or affective, e.g., positive, negative, and neutral descriptions, and when presented in the mass media, the substantive or affective attribute agenda influences the image of the issue or candidate among voters. Critics of second level agenda setting, such as Toshio Takeshita (2006), argue that the result is, that “agenda-setting research and framing research are exploring almost the same problem: how the mass media define an individual issue for us”.

Another concern of the selection and production process is how the relationships between media shape the media agenda. This is commonly described as intermedia agenda setting, which refers to, how one mass media agenda exerts its influence on another. Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, and Lennon (1998) describe intermedia agenda setting as a relationship between different types of mass media, but also between news agencies and news mass media, then linking intermedia agenda setting to theories of news

gatekeeping (Lewin, 1947; White, 1950). Sweetser, Golan, and Wanta (2008), who explored intermedia agenda setting between television, advertising, candidate websites, and blogging as part of the 2004 election in the United States, defined the term intermedia agenda setting, as “those instances when the media agenda is shaped by other media”. Among their findings were that blog posts “displayed the highest signification correlation with the media agenda during the hot phase of the campaign”, but also that the news media continued to drive the agenda by telling the public and campaigns what to think about”. Vliegthart and Walgrave Apart from the traditional transmission of salient issues on the media agenda, there are other reasons for the importance of intermedia agenda setting. Dearing and Rogers (1996) have observed that news people “take their clues about an issue’s priority from other media”. Vliegthart and Walgrave (2008) add two dimensions to this observation. The first is that intermedia agenda setting is a form of imitation process, which helps to uphold the news norms within the journalistic community, since it indirectly validates “what is news and what is not”. And secondly, intermedia agenda setting is part of the “competitive setting of most media markets”, where media emulate other media as soon as it is to their advantage, and consequently the dynamics of the intermedia agenda setting process cause the “mass media coverage of issues to follow similar patterns”.

In the past decade, a third level of agenda-setting has been conceptualised as building on a networked media agenda, where “news media serve to connect new information to old information in the audience’s existing associative network memory”. Guo and McCombs (Guo et al., 2012) refer to third level of agenda-setting as the *Network Agenda Setting Model*. In this model, salience is equated to retrievability, but unlike previous perceptions of salience, salience is defined as the “centrality of an object or attribute on the public agenda”, thus stressing that importance of an agenda derives from the news media’s “capability to construct the connections among agendas, thereby constructing the centrality of certain agenda elements in the public’s mind”.

Adding another dimension to the selection process is how agendas are constructed through media events and media rituals. Media events, Dayan and Katz (1992) argue, are interruptions of the media routines. Media events are monopolistic in form, and often they are live television transmissions and breaking news across media channels, but they do not need to be. In politics, media events occur when the Prime Minister calls for an election before the end of an election term, a sudden cabinet reshuffling, or the announcement of a major political agreement, and they often lead to intermedia agenda setting, including on social media. Couldry (2003), on the other hand, argues that

media events work to *construct* a sense of a social center, thus media events, including interruptions, should be regarded as entanglements of the media's ritual power. Adding to this, Couldry argues that 'media rituals' should be viewed as performative actions, or 'ritualised' forms of action, that include actions such as habitual actions, formalised actions, or actions involving transcendent values, which occur in a social space, which Couldry refers to as 'the ritual space of the media'. Carey (1989) have observed that media rituals may be related to the processes of information transmission or attitude change constructed within an "ritualistic view of communication and social order", but he argues that "news is not information but drama", and media rituals then are not just ritualised relays of pure information, but "portrayals of contending social forces in the world".

### **Political Agenda Setting**

Research in policy agenda-setting, often referred to as agenda-building, refers to the study of how political actors' constructs agendas of political controversy to influence media coverage, i.e. the media agenda, or the public opinion, and sometimes it refers to how the news media influence politics or the political outcome of the media agenda. Policy agenda setting is closely related to public sphere theories, like Habermas (1992), theories of elitist democracy, (Walker, 1966), and agenda-building (Cobb & Elder, 1971). Schattschneider (1960) observed that in political conflict there is no prearranged agreements on the issues, and that the right to define the issues and the alternatives is a matter of political power. As such, Schattschneider argues that the one "who determines what politics is about runs the country, because the definition of alternatives is the choice of conflicts, and the choice allocates power". Yet, in referring to the political agenda as the *agenda of controversy*, Walker (1966: 292) noted that the "list of questions which are recognized by the active participants in politics as legitimate subjects of attention and concern, is very hard to change". In most parliamentary systems, government needs support from a majority of parties in parliament to secure viability and legitimacy of policy decisions. In countries with a minority government, the broader the majority, the better. To sway parliamentary support for or against government policies or decisions, government and opposition fight for the power to control the political agenda and tries to influence the media agenda in order to secure support in the public opinion.

In studying the agenda building in the United States Senate, Walker (1977) argued that the political agenda could be described as a continuum including four dimensions, which range from one set of items politicians are required to deal with to another set of items that politicians choose to promote. Walker observed that political actors, who have the power to shape the legislative agenda, would be able to "magnify their influence many times over by

determining the focus of attention and energy in the entire political system”. Often the perception of the influence of political actors is founded on the power to broker complex negotiations and make tough decisions, and as such this perception becomes a reflection of vital importance for legitimacy. In studying political power and decision-making, Bachrach & Baratz (1963, 1975) found that “many mistakenly assume” that power is activated and observed only in decision-making situations, and in doing so, they overlooked the equally, if not more important area of “nondecision-making”. Bachrach & Baratz refer to this nondecision-making as the “practice of limiting the scope of actual decision-making to “safe” issues by manipulating the dominant community values, myths, and political institutions and procedures”.

In acknowledging that no single, unifying political agenda exists, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2016) refer to the composite political agenda, as the “priority list of politics”. This priority list is closely related to the issues on the news media’s agendas, but also to how the news media cover and frame societal and political issues. The news media are broadly understood as significant for the process of political agenda-setting. The news media and the media agendas are regarded as influential sources of information for the political actors and important for the issues on the political agenda, and as such, the news media are seen to contribute to with important information about the state of politics and the publics’ response to current issues on the agenda.

While mass media may exert a high degree of influence on the political agenda, there are other elements that influence the political agenda. Walgrave and Van Aelst have identified two different kinds of agendas, symbolic and resource agendas. The symbolic agenda refers to issues that “require visible, but not necessarily substantive, action on the part of policy makers”, whereas the resource agendas are often complex “issues that require substantive action, including the possible allocation of resources”. Issues on the symbolic agenda may more prominent than issues on a resource agenda. Often the symbolic agendas play better in the news media, since they do not require in-depth analysis of potential resource allocations or deeply rooted ideological manifestations but can be fitted into news media formats that support fast and short news stories, in effect formats that a supported by the news media logic. Walgrave and Van Aelst argue that the news media generally support coverage which is fast and brief, is negatively framed, is conflictual, and which attributes responsibility to the involved actors. Conversely, political actors must be responsive to the media agendas as well as the public agendas, if they want to be influential sources of information for the political agenda. Adding to this, Walgrave and Van Aelst have observed that the responsiveness by different political actors is contingent on a few factors.



First, there is a relation between political power and media responsiveness. Walgrave and Van Aelst (2016) have observed that opposition parties are more responsive to media coverage than government parties. This may not be surprising, since governments usually have the burden of responsibility, whereas the opposition is expected to attribute blame. Second, the concept of issue ownership is important to politicians and parties, and how they respond. Issue ownership is often attributed to symbolic agendas, but there might also be a relationship between the parties' recency and history. Finally, responsiveness may also be contingent on the political actors' ability to influence the media agenda. In a comparative study of the influence of the political actors, e.g. the government, the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers, the political parties, and the members of parliament, by Van Aelst and Walgrave, they found that only absolute elite politicians, i.e. on the level of Prime Ministers, had enough independent agenda-setting power to outweigh the influence of the news media selection process, less prominent politicians, even cabinet ministers or party leaders, found it difficult to gain access to the media agenda.

Apart from the news media, there are numerous other sources which influence the political agenda. Obviously, the political agenda is shaped by constitutional and legislative agendas, as well as parliamentary orders, events, and rituals. There are several political actors with the formal political system which contributes to the political agenda and have their own agendas. These include the government, e.g. the Prime Minister (Green-Pedersen et al., 2018), political parties (Asp, 1983; Hopmann et al., 2012) and individual members of parliament (Davis, 2007; Sevenans et al., 2016). Outside the formal political system, there are several actors, including individual citizens, which may be perceived as expressions of public opinion and as such can influence the political agenda, often through more or less organized offline and/or online public protest (Bennett, 2013; Husted & Hansen, 2017; Neumayer & Rossi, 2016; Neumayer & Stald, 2014; Tufekci, 2017), representatives from civil society, such as trade-unions, non-governmental organisations, as well as think tanks or public relations agencies (Blach-Ørsten & Aagaard, 2018).

### **Social Media, Political Agenda Setting and Public Opinion**

In the United Kingdom, the post-Brexit referendum led to a state of constant controversy and uncertainty about the country's position in the European Union, toxic leadership challenges. Adding to the political turmoil, the country has held three national elections since 2015. In the United States, the political arena has become intensely polarized, highly partisan, and engrossed in endless controversy with President Donald Trump front and centre. Both countries are characterized by majoritarian electoral systems, with low levels

of participation in voting<sup>4</sup>, and very competitive liberal media systems with markets dominated by commercial media, though the United Kingdom still have a strong public service media model. In a study of the news following Edward Snowden’s revelations about the surveillance practices of the United States National Security Administration (NSA) and the United Kingdom Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), Boynton and Richardson (2016) observed that “television could no longer set the agenda” in the Snowden case, and thus, that agenda-setting could “no longer be understood as a monopoly of the mainstream media”. Boynton and Richardson concluded that because of social media platforms’ “reach, interaction, and broadening of ideas brought into the discussion, emerge as a distinctive mode of large-scale communication”. In a study of how social media could create an agenda-setting effect through sharing of political news, Jessica Feezell (2018) argued that social media can serve an agenda-setting function by providing users with incidental political information through “the process of two-step communication flow within networks”. Feezell found that political issues posted on social media could convey an agenda-setting effect, but also that the effect was strongest among those with low levels of political interest. In both countries, social media platforms have been the arenas of perpetual campaigning since well before 2016, where political actors of all sorts have tried to influence the news media, public opinion, i.e. the voters, and eventually the electoral outcomes. Almost needless to say, the agenda-setting role of social media platforms have been much discussed and highly contested. And while there is no short supply of research on agenda-setting and social media platforms from the United Kingdom and the United States, the recent contexts have been electoral campaigning and referendums, where there overall focus has been on how to persuade voters, not on how to deliberate on legislative issues or how to run the daily business of a government elected in a system with open list, multiparty, proportional elections and a democratic corporatist media systems, where the attention to issues on the political agenda drops off outside electoral campaigning. In a political system, like the Danish, after an election, the government in place takes care of business, the opposition plays its part. Legislation is on the political agenda, and campaigning is at a low level. Advertising drops, parties scale down, staffers are laid off, consultants fired, and the parties evaluate and assess election results, and plan and prepare for the next elections. This does not mean that politics is eventless. In everyday politics, the political actors in the formal arena go through mediated political rituals, e.g. the opening of parliament, adoption of the financial act, public addresses, e.g. the Prime

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<sup>4</sup> In the recent election in the United Kingdom, participation dropped 1.5 percent, down from 68.8 percent in 2017 to 67.3 percent in 2019.

Ministers speech on new-years, parliamentary events, like PMQs, or party conferences, and occasionally, the political agenda is interrupted by major political events, such as cabinet reshuffles, political crises, or post-election party reorganizations.

While there seem to be a general agreement that media agenda of the news media still exerts a great influence on the public agenda (Carson & McNair, 2018; Russell Neuman et al., 2014), political actors are increasingly using social media platforms to influence the media agenda, both as an important source of political information, and as channels to influence on the public agenda and public opinion directly. For the past decades, political actors have used digital and social media platforms to disintermediate, or bypass, the news media in order to retain control of their own political communication and interactions with voters. But social media platforms have also become important for political actors set and respond to the agendas and issues in the news media. As such, agenda-setting and disintermediation are central concepts for understanding the power of social media platforms since they highlight why and how mass media are losing autonomy and increasingly are becoming dependent of social media. In exploring the use of Facebook for agenda-setting in the national election in the United States in 2012, Dean Freelon (2015) observed the transformative shift in the political actors use of Facebook. Freelon argued that

Politicians can communicate with citizens in two ways. They can take the indirect route by funneling their thoughts to citizens through the news media, which may alter them in unanticipated ways. Alternatively, politicians are increasingly turning to digital media to communicate directly with citizens, cutting the news media out of the equation entirely. The rise in popularity of such disintermediated or “one-step flow” communication pathways [...] introduces intriguing new possibilities for well-known political communication theories.

In exploring politicians’ motivation for using social media, Hoffmann, Suphan, and Meckel (2016) noted that, while social media platforms offered politicians “unique opportunities to directly address interested and like-minded communities and present their positions while circumventing the classical media agenda”, a range of studies had found that the “political elites seem quite willing to use new media to distribute information”, they rarely took advantage of the platforms’ interactive affordances. Similarly, in exploring the Norwegian parties’ strategies and practices in the national election in 2013, Bente Kalsnes (2016) found that the party leaders of major parties mainly used social media for broadcasting information and seldom

responded to voters on Facebook, but also that their posts generated more “more comments and interactions than party leaders of the minor parties”, despite the party leaders of the minor parties “more interactive communication style”.

Political information diffusion not limited to the individual politicians’ presence on social media platforms, but it has also become part of the political parties’ strategic use of digital and social media as information channels. Most parties have their own internal news media, like print magazines, news pages on party intranets, or email newsletters, but in recent years, political actors have actively supported the establishment and operations of independent hyperpartisan media actors, with whom they share some political affinity. In the last Danish national election, Jeppe Juhl, a leading candidate for the right-wing party the New Right, was also the founder of the hyperpartisan news media 24NYT. Another notable right-wing hyperpartisan news media, *Den Korte Avis*, is founded by the political celebrity couple, Karen Jespersen and Ralf Pittelkow<sup>5</sup>. The media often pushes agendas reflecting views on the far right. Political parties have also established their own external party news media outlets with close party affinity, but with varying degrees of editorial independence. The Danish Social Democrats are closely linked to the Social Democratic online news media *Pio Pio*, which was named after the founder of the Danish Social Democratic movement, Louis Pio. The media was founded by leading members of the party. Several editors and journalists are known party members, and the editor in chief was standing as a party candidate in the last national election. Similarly, the Danish Peoples Party, has launched the news media *ditoverblik.dk*, which is run as an independent news media by journalists employed by the party. While the importance of these hyperpartisan and party media for the media agenda can be discussed and contested, they are often used to serve alternative views on current events and shared on social media platform they exert some influence on the public opinion, which the related parties can tap into.

Political actors are also able to reach voters on social media platforms, who, before social media, had very limited possibilities to be heard in political discussions other than in the occasional opinion poll. In the era of broadcast mass media, voters were passive audiences consuming politics, but with social media, they were afforded possibilities for political participation. As Elihu Katz (2014) suggested in his essay, *Back to the Streets*, that if “mainstream media moved politics inside and kept them there, thus largely

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<sup>5</sup> In their youth, Jespersen and Pittelkow were active on the Danish left-wing, but gradually they moved to the centre of Danish politics. Jespersen became a member of parliament and a government minister for the Social Democratic party, and later the Liberal Party, and Pittelkow was a special advisor to the prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen.

neutralizing opinion, perhaps the new media are moving politics outside again”. Similarly, Margetts, John, Hale, and Yasseri (2015) argue that social media afford citizens to perform *tiny acts of participation*, e.g. they can show support or dissent through likes, shares, or comments on political issues on Facebook or engage in political discussions on Twitter. Conversely, political actors need to be present and responsive to these tiny acts on social media, or to mobilize support, or set the media agenda.

### **Previous Research in Everyday Politics**

Previous studies in the use of Danish politicians and parties use of social media platforms outside election campaigning are very sparse, and they rarely have focus on everyday politics and the political rituals during times of regular government. Apart from the limited research within the field in general (Cf. chapter 3: The Danish Case), one possible explanation for the lack of studies is that researchers have turned their focus towards short term effects of citizen interaction and participation with social media and the news media, or to studies of citizenship, social movements, and social media; rather than to studies of the more long-term strategic communication of politicians and parties. This it has left us in a situation where we have no longitudinal studies of the Danish politicians’ communication strategies, and only very few studies of political and media events in everyday political life. The available studies from the past decade however do provide us with valuable insights into the use of social media within a Danish context.

In one of the first studies of the use of Facebook among Members of Parliament and parties in 2010, Duvander Højholt and Kosiara-Pedersen (2011) found that the politicians and parties were far from benefitting from the full potential of Facebook for interacting with the voters. At that point in time, only a quarter of the Members of Parliament had Facebook Pages suited for communication with the voters, communication seemed to be of a more personal than political nature, and Duvander Højholt and Kosiara-Pedersen found that interaction on the Facebook Pages were limited to existing friends and fans, rather than a wider audience. The party leaders were all present on Facebook, but their activities varied considerably. Likewise, the political parties were all present on Facebook, but rather than promoting political conversations and deliberations, the parties directed interactions towards mobilizing friends and fans. Despite little effect in everyday politics, attributed to scarce political attention among voters outside electoral campaigning combined with the politicians and parties limited use of Facebook, Duvander Højholt and Kosiara-Pedersen found that because of changes in the news media market, Facebook could be a useful as a political marketing tool in the upcoming election campaigns.

In a quantitative study of studies of political conversations during June 2014 on the Members of Parliament's social media platforms, Mads P. Sørensen (2016) found that politicians' were generally present on Facebook and Twitter, and to varying degrees, they were actively using the platforms to make political posts. According to Sørensen, the Members of Parliaments' political posts on Facebook generated a "relatively high degree of engagement in political conversations with citizens". Part of the engagement came from likes, but a diverse and relatively wide group of citizens also engaged in debates in the comments feed. The politicians took part in the conversation, although to a much lesser degree, despite a harsh tone, and direct and often personal responses. The combined large scale presence of politicians and the civic engagement on the platform, lead Sørensen to the conclusion that Facebook was an "inevitable and interesting arena to study if we want to know more about political conversations in contemporary Western democracies" (2016: 682). This first study was followed by an interview based qualitative study by Sørensen, which focused on how Members of Parliament experienced these political conversations on Facebook. In this study, Sørensen found that although the politicians thought of Facebook as an "efficient tool to get political messages across" to the voters, they considered it less efficient than television or radio. Adding to this, Sørensen found that the politicians seemed to be caught between two "inner" political logics. In the first logic, the politicians primary concern was to get (re-)elected, in the other, political conversations were considered more important. Correspondingly, while some politicians found that Facebook was a "a valuable platform for political conversations", others did not think it was "not worth the effort", since it entailed a considerable workload, often a lacked engagement, and, not least, the harassment from the audience was substantial.

### **Digital Methods: Governing with Social Media**

Political communication has always been partisan, but in elections more so, than in everyday politics. In the complex humdrum of everyday politics in a multiparty system, Members of Parliament and the political parties seem occupied by communicating the status of current political positions, informing audiences of the rationality of ongoing negotiations in the legislative work, responding to the events and rituals governing the political decision making process, and conveying the deliberations from parliament floor. While it might sound as a collaborative and peaceful process, there is a continuous and tense political battle going on about the allocation of resources, sharing of funds, and the distribution of power. In this conflict, political communication is paramount in determining what the political choices are and who gets to decide. In a parliamentary multiparty system, like the Danish system, majority governments are rare, and to rule, most

governments must find support for its policies from parties outside the government, often even outside the coalition of parties, which have secured the foundation of government in the first place. Corporation across the political spectrum is considered a foundational value. Compromises have to be made to secure legitimacy of the government; political decisions need support from the public and the voters.

In that process, political communication is essential to all political actors. In the past, this communication to the public was largely controlled by mass media. To set the political agenda, politicians had to conform to the news media's affordances and production routines, the formats of broadcast television, and adapt to the media logic of autonomous mass media. The politicians' dependency on mass media led to an increased mediatization of the political communication culture. Today, this political communication culture has been reconfigured by social media platforms. Because of social media, politicians no longer need to rely entirely on the news reporting in broadcast media to get their messages through to the voters. In everyday politics, where news reporting from the political arena is less intense than in the election season, politicians can respond and interact with voters, party members, fans and followers, and even the news media on social media platforms. Obviously, this presupposes that the politicians are present and active on social media platforms, that they adapt to the routines and formats to engage the public. While this "always-on" logic of social media may lead what Larsson (2016) refers to as the "blurred lines between campaigning and governing", and perhaps even increased partisanship, it has certainly led to a political communication culture, where there is a continuous responsiveness to political events, and increased mediatization because of social media platforms and their logic.

### **Data Collection: The Events and Artefacts**

The year in the Danish Parliament is a long string of ritualised events, which follow certain formal rules (Cf. chapter 3. The Danish Case). The three main political events are the opening of Parliament, the Financial Act, and the final adoption of legislation and the concluding debates in June.

The opening of Parliament takes place on the first Tuesday of October, where the Prime Minister gives an opening speech to parliament laying out the Government's plans and the bills to be introduced to parliament. Following the Prime Minister's speech, Members of Parliament debate the opening speech, the upcoming bills, and current political issues. The Finance Act is negotiated in the autumn and should be passed before the Christmas holidays. In spring the legislative work includes policy negotiations in committees, and deliberations and voting on individual bills in parliament assemblies. In the

concluding debate in June, the Prime Minister summarises the legislative work in an account of the domestic and international political situation, which is then followed by a debate by the Members of Parliament. In practical terms, these and other political and institutional events are made accessible to the public through the Danish Parliament's own Internet services and on social media platforms, and the Government use the Internet and social media platforms as communication channels as well. In what follows I will shortly introduce these channels.

### **Presence on Social Media**

In the past decade I have mapped the Danish Members of Parliament's presence on and use of the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. Each year since 2010, I have registered the presence of Members of Parliament on Facebook and Twitter. In election years, the members were registered right before and after the elections, and in years with no elections, tallying the members was a continuous process, which included a registration of the number of Members of Parliament on Facebook and Twitter in the week before the opening of parliament, i.e., in late September or the beginning of October.

I frequently refer to *presence* and *use*, but the lines between the two concepts are often blurred. When I refer to presence on social media platforms, I think of the act of creating a profile, a page, or a handle on a platform, not use of the platform as such. Obviously, the process of building a presence involves some sort of activity, like getting the name right, filling in the bio, posting a profile image, or adding a cover image. To some extent, this is a form of use. It is the construction of an identity on social media, which Mikko Villi argues should be understood as a form of mediated authentication (Villi, 2015). When it happens routinely in the context of a political communication culture where the use of social media is pervasive, it becomes a part of the mediatization process.

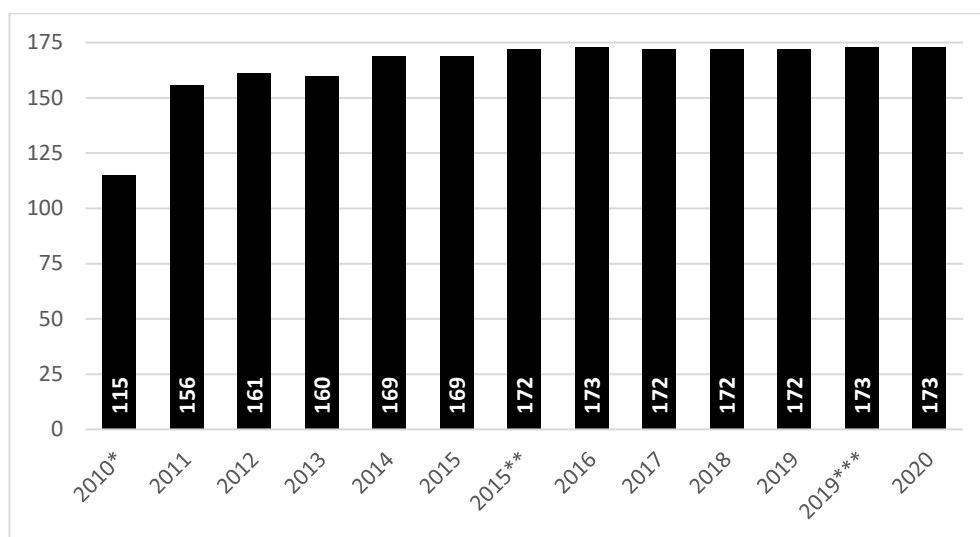
In general, I think of presence as a necessary first step for actively using social media platforms, e.g., posting content or interacting with other users. These are all important acts which entail use of the affordances of social media and should be regarded as a basic adapting to social media logic. Consider the construction of presence on social media platforms, as the construction of a communication machine. As for the concept of use, it is more straightforward. To stay with the machine metaphor, think of what the user *produces* with the machine. Use then is the creation of user generated content, UGC, or if you will, the production of semantic information for social media platforms and how users interact with it. In this respect, the use of social media platforms is important for understanding the mediatization of politics.



Keeping it simple, most social media platforms operate with terms like *daily active users* (DAU) or *monthly active users* (MAU) to describe basic forms of content production or user engagements and interactions with and on the platform. In general, I refer to active users as users who perform an activity on a platform with a given time frame.

### The Facebook Nation

Founded in 2004, Facebook was first introduced in Denmark in 2006, but rapidly, the platform became popular among the Danes and part of political communication. By the time of the general election in 2007, all parties, except from the Danish Peoples' Party, had joined Facebook, and some of the party leaders and tech savvy candidates were spearheading the politicians' presence on the social media platform. In a sense, the platform was more of a novel interest than an efficient communication platform for politicians in 2007. But in the following years, and with the American election in 2008 in mind and the possibility of the Danish general election taking place in 2009, the Danish politicians established themselves in large numbers on Facebook. By 2010, the majority of the Members of Parliament were present and active on the platform, and the political discussions on the platform began to impact the wider media system and public sphere. During the closing debate of the Danish Parliaments 2009-2010 sessions, the Members of Parliaments' use of social media became a heated affair. The Speaker of Parliament, Thor Pedersen demanded that parliament set limits for the use of Facebook and Twitter in the parliament's chamber (Jonshøj, 2010). No actions were taken against the use of Facebook and Twitter, but by the time of the opening debates in Parliament in October 2010, it was clear that the politicians would continue to use social media.



*Members of Parliament on Facebook from 2010 to 2020.*

The overall presence of Members of Parliament on Facebook increased with each election when the candidates have used the platform in their campaigns. But following the general election in 2011, the number of on Facebook increased steadily during the term as well, typically among incumbent Members of Parliament who had not previously been present on the platform. In the last years of the term ending in 2015, only six members were not on Facebook, i.e., three from Danish Peoples Party, and respectively one from the Red-Green Alliance, the Liberal Party, and the Conservative Party. Following the general election in 2015, only two Members of Parliament from Danish Peoples Party were not visibly present on Facebook, and just one from the Red-Green Alliance did not have a page. During the term in 2015 – 2016, all members from the Red-Green Alliance had joined Facebook.

Following the general election in 2019, all but two members were present on Facebook. One was the incumbent member from the Danish Peoples Party, Alex Ahrendtsen, the other was the newly re-elected Jette Gottlieb from the Red-Green Alliance, and none of them seem likely to use Facebook in their future work. When he was first elected to parliament, Ahrendtsen used Facebook for campaigning in the general election in 2011. But following the election, Ahrendtsen stopped using Facebook for political and public purposes in 2012, stating that he would rather spend time on the legislative work, than on Facebook (Dyssel, 2012). Ahrendtsen continued:

Electioneering is a special situation where the legislative work comes to a standstill. You need to get messages out and be in contact with the voters all the time, and then Facebook is smart.

Jette Gottlieb from the Red-Green Alliance was a Member of Parliament from September 1994 to November 2001, but the rules of the left-wing party do not allow its Members of Parliament to represent the party for more than seven years, after which they must vacate their seat for the next election. By the general election in 2019, Gottlieb was no newcomer in national politics, but a political veteran, well-known among Red-Green Alliance voters. But nor has she been present on or used social media platforms, including Facebook. In 2015, the leader of the Red-Green Alliance, Johanne Schmidt Nielsen mused over Gottlieb's non-use of Facebook, in a post on Facebook (Schmidt-Nielsen, 2015)<sup>6</sup>: “Am on a training course together with our candidates on how to use Facebook. Am sitting next to Jette Gottlieb. I don't think it will happen”. Presumably, the post was made in good fun, but it is

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<sup>6</sup> My translation. The original text is: “Er på kursus med vores folketingskandidater i hvordan man bruger facebook. Sidder ved siden af Jette Gottlieb. Jeg tror ikke det kommer til at ske”.

telling about the current political communication culture, that absence from social media platforms is ridiculed by other politicians. Curiously, Jette Gottlieb never established a presence on Facebook, but in 2014, a fake profile was created in her name in an apparent attempt to mock her. Today, the fake profile still exists (Runge, 2019). Gottlieb and Ahrendtsen are both exceptions to the rule, representing a very small minority of parliament members who make very conscious choices of not being on social media.



*Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen makes fun of Jette Gottlieb*

### Blocked by Facebook

Occasionally, Members of Parliament have been barred from posting on Facebook. Sometimes the Members of Parliament have been blocked because of complaints from other users on Facebook, sometimes they have been blocked for posting content which violates Facebook’s community standards. One example of the first case was when the former party leader of the Danish Peoples Party, Pia Kjærsgaard (Voergaard, 2013) was barred from posting on the platform in 24 hours after offended Facebook users had complained about one of her posts. In the offensive post, Pia Kjærsgaard had called Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt “stupid” and “naïve”.

In October 2016, party leader of the Alternative, Uffe Elbæk was banned repeatedly for violating Facebook’s community standards by posting photographs by Frida Gregersen of nude people walking down the main stairway in the parliament (Ritzau, 2016). In September 2016, Elbæk had been very vocal in his criticism of Facebook for removing Nick Ut's photograph, The Terror of War, from 1972, which show the girl Kim Phuc running away naked from American bombing in Vietnam. His aim by posting Gregersen’s photographs was a continued challenge of Facebook’s censorship of important cultural images. The original post, which got Elbæk was barred from on the platform and had the post removed as well, was posted on October 15. Back at the platform, Uffe Elbæk decided to go another round against Facebook and post



*Uffe Elbæk gets banned from Facebook*

the photos once again. Doing so, Elbæk was eventually blocked again by Facebook on October 26. While Elbæk received some media attention, he was criticized by some followers on Facebook for being incompetent.

### **Leaving Facebook**

The Members of Parliament presence on Facebook – or any other social media platform – is, however, not just a matter of the members establishing themselves on the platform. Occasionally, members have said they would leave Facebook and been very vocal about it.

In 2014, Søren Espersen from the Danish Peoples Party left Facebook after criticizing the tone and the threats on the platform. In what was supposed to be his “last post on Facebook” (Espersen, 2014), Espersen said goodbye to Facebook, and continued to explain, that he spent too much time moderating the page. Five years later and just in time for the short campaign for the general election in 2019, Søren Espersen began posting on Facebook once again. In his first post in April 2019, Espersen wrote that he had created a YouTube channel and wanted to use Facebook to share the videos from YouTube (Espersen, 2019). A week later, Espersen had shared no less than 15 posts on Facebook, most of them videos from YouTube. Remarkably, Espersen made a similar move on Twitter. In August 2018, Espersen announced on Twitter that he did not have time to read or reply to comments on Twitter, and that he was considering leaving Twitter altogether, like “he had left Facebook four years earlier” (Espersen, 2018). In an interview with the press agency Ritzau, Espersen said that “Social media are very exhausting in terms of time. There comes a routine, where you have to keep up all the time, and simply I no longer have the energy” (Ritzau, 2018). Less than a week later, Espersen was back and actively posting on Twitter.

Another example of a Member of Parliament abandon a popular Facebook page was supplied by Søren Pind, a prominent member of the Liberal Party and then a government minister. Pind, who had more than forty thousand followers on his Facebook page, opposed the platform’s algorithmic logic, which, according to Pind, continuously prompted him to read and respond to unread messages, thus making him more “dependent of systems” he did not want. Instead, Søren Pind stated, that he would exclusively use Twitter to communicate with (Pind, 2017). Though Søren Pind scale down his engagement on the platform for a while, he remained active during several campaigns, including the general election in 2019.

A final example of politicians leaving Facebook is that of the afore mentioned party leader for the Alternative, Uffe Elbæk. Having watched the documentary film, *The Great Hack* on Netflix about the Cambridge Analytica scandal (Elbæk, 2019a), Elbæk found himself caught in a dilemma between the benefits of using Facebook as a campaign platform on the one side, and the of Facebook exploiting peoples personal information for commercial and political purposes. Eventually,



*Elbæk moves to Duckling*

Elbæk decided that it was time to leave Facebook and move to the small social media platform Duckling (Elbæk, 2019c). Over the years, Elbæk have had continuous issues with Facebook, often challenging the platforms political and cultural role, but at the same time, he remained heavy user of the platform.

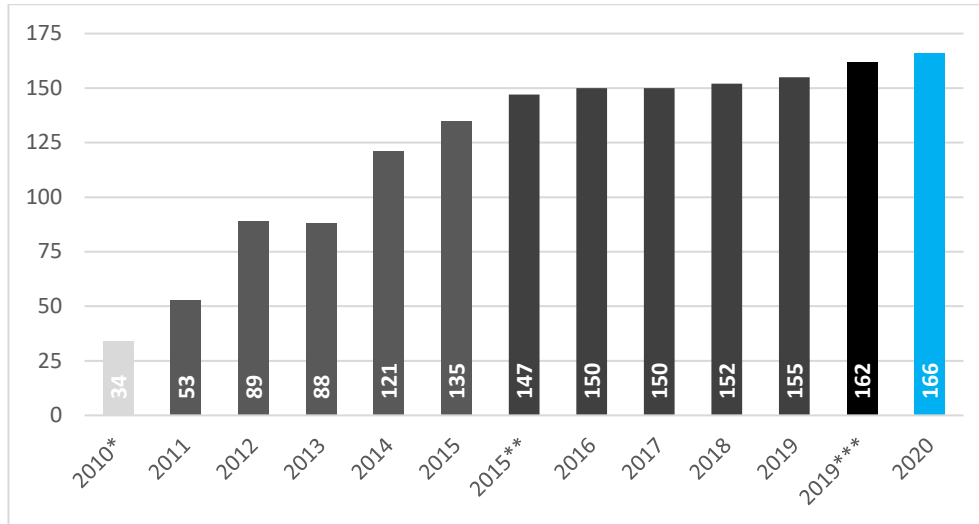
### **The Intranet**

Founded in 2006, Twitter had a slow adoption by a limited number of Danish users in 2008 and 2009, including a small fragment of Danish politicians, mainly centre-right politicians. Even when the platform grew in terms of users, activity remained low.

In 2010, Danish social media monitoring company, Overskrift estimated that the Danish 20.000 (Bøgh-Andersen, 2010), and only half of those were considered active users. At the end of 2015, the company estimated that there were roughly 300.000 Danish users on Twitter, but only considered a third of those as active users (Lange, 2015). On top of that, Twitter faced competition with other microblogging services, like jaiku.com and tumblr.com. While Twitter afforded the users with short text formats of 140 characters and sharing of only text and links, which could be used to facilitate snappy debates and fast exchanges of political views, the majority of Danish politicians were cautious and reluctant in adopting the platform.

From the start, conventional wisdom had it that Twitter was platform for political actors, such as Members of Parliament, the parties, and party members and supporters, and the media elite (including journalists, political commentators, communication professionals). Often, the platform has been referred to as the *parliament's intranet*. It is, however, not until recent years that Members of Parliament have established a presence on the platform (as seen in the bar chart below), which match that of their presence on Facebook. But the number of politicians on Twitter is still significantly lower than on

Facebook. Amongst those present, some have not gotten past registering their handle and posting the first tweet, many have not filled out the account biography, and a few still use Twitter’s original placeholder image as their profile images. Some have used their account to post a few tweets during an election campaign, and in terms of everyday use of Twitter, remarkably few are active.



*Illustration 2: Members of Parliament on Twitter from 2010 to 2020.*

In general, the chart shows an increase between 2010 and 2020, but growth usually occurred in the year before an election or as the result of an election (\*MPs on Twitter prior to the National Election in 2011. \*\*After the National Election 2015. \*\*\*After the National Election 2019).

### **Taking the Lead on Social Media Platforms**

The party leaders play significant roles in the political arena. They are each the visible representatives for their respective parties and they reflect party policies and strategies. They represent their parties in the political coalitions, either to the left or to the right, in government or in opposition. In the past decade, the party leaders from either the Liberal Party or the Social Democratic Party have served as either the Prime Minister or the leader of the opposition. The party leaders from minor parties have been the representatives in either the coalition in government or the coalition in opposition. This does not mean that parties have absolute positions to the right or left in Danish politics, within the coalitions. Their positions are often fluid, they may disagree with their coalition partners, and often parties give up short term gains, to secure a long time influence. The parties will compromise and collaborate, since influence on legislation are given to those who are part of the political agreements. Even in a political system like the Danish, which is often ruled by a minority government, it is considered a virtue that the

government can rule across the centre and that opposition parties aim for influence and consensus. But sometimes, the parties disagree on value based issues. For the past two decades, immigration policies have been front and centre of political disagreements in parliament and among the coalitions, and immigration policies have been used to make and break governments. In both respects, either consensus or disagreement, the parties constantly have a need to legitimise their policies and inform people who voted for them, party members, and the public.

### **Data Collection and Methods**

In the past decade, as political actors have become increasingly present and active on social media, I have tried to collect data from the social media platforms and organise the collected data, so it could be understood in the context of politics, including elections and institutional events. In a Danish context, it was a given that research should include Facebook, because its extensive and popular use among Danish politicians and parties and their direct interactions with Danes on social media, and Twitter, because the platform is important in for the interplay between politicians and the news media.

For this specific case, my primary interest was to explore the party leaders use of Facebook and Twitter, since they were among those who used the platforms most. To understand the developments in a comparative perspective, this case has its primary focus on one month every year from 2010 to 2019, which includes the week before the opening of parliament, which are often filled with party conferences or party meeting in the respective party groups in Parliament. Then follows the opening week in Parliament, where the Prime Minister present upcoming legislation including the government's proposal for the Financial Act, and debates in parliament, where the other party leaders' respond to the government's proposals. After a couple of weeks of intense political work, the month usually ends with a week of fall vacation in mid or late October.

Initially, the originally data collection, from 2010 to 2014, was primarily based on manual collection and registration of the party leaders' presence and posts on Facebook and Twitter, but it was supported by experiments with accessing the platforms APIs and scraping posts. Over the years, this practise grew into structured observations – including registration of the party leaders' presence and use of social media platforms, mainly Facebook and Twitter, but also on Instagram, and LinkedIn. From 2015 to 2016, I supplemented the data collection from the platforms with data from social media monitoring services, such as *Fanpage Karma* and *Quintly*. The aim was to collect more data from a growing field of mainly the Members of Parliament, but also the

from the candidates standing in the elections. Given the services access to historical data, the data collected originally was compared to that from these services. As such, the extended data collection became a way of verifying previously collected data, and vice versa. From 2016 until mid-2018, I wrote and used a server, running PHP scripts to collect data from Facebook and Twitter via the companies' API access and I stored data on a MySQL server. Data from Facebook included page likes, the volume of posts, the types of posts used by the party leaders, e.g. Status, Link, Photo, Video, Note, and Event, and a content analysis based on the content of the Facebook posts. When the access to Facebook's API was shut down following the Cambridge Analytica scandal, data collection from Facebook came to a halt. Occasionally, and for no apparent reason, the scripts would be able to access Facebook's API and collect some more data, but not all. To supplement and verify the collected data, I later used Fanpage Karma once again. Adding to the collection of data from Twitter from 2018, I have been running several instances of the DMI-TCAT from the Digital Methods Lab at the University of Amsterdam.

To contextualise the party leaders' use of social media platforms for agenda-setting in the news media, I have retrieved data from the Danish news media database Infomedia. The bulk of the collected data reference the volume of news media reports mentioning the party leaders in general, but it also includes news media reports which mention the individual party leaders and mentions of either Facebook or Twitter.

### **Party Leaders on Social Media**

While social media platforms are often discussed in relation to elections, the party leaders, Members of Parliament, and parties have increasingly used platforms for their communication between elections. In the beginning of the decade, party leaders flocked to Facebook, and all party leaders have used Facebook pages actively. The only exception has been Pernille Vermund (NB), who first established a Facebook page in November 2019. Until then, she had been using a Facebook profile since December 2008. This does not mean that all party leaders have been engaged in posting content to their Facebook pages. Pia Kjærsgaard (DPP) explicitly states that her staff takes care of what is posted on her Facebook page. In 2012, Villy Søvndal (SPP) found that he could not endorse his preferred candidate as his successor as party leader to Facebook, when his assistant refused to post the endorsement (Runge, 2013a).

The party leaders' presence on Twitter is a different story. Although there were many early adopters of Twitter among the party leaders, many of them seemed to have difficulties coming to terms with the platform too. Some have



established a presence on Twitter but have left their accounts inactive. Adding to the calamities, numerous fake accounts were established to mock the party leaders, causing confusion on Twitter, in the parties, and for the party leaders themselves.

In 2011, the conservative party leader, Lars Barfoed, who was not on Twitter, unwittingly linked to a fake Twitter account in his name, thus leading other members of the party to think that the account was his and link to it (Runge, 2011b, 2011c). Eventually, the Conservative Party cleaned up the mess, but the confusion lasted until Barfoed finally joined Twitter in 2014 (Runge, 2014). A similar thing happened to the party leader of the Socialists Peoples' Party, Villy Søvndal, who could see a Twitter account registered in Søvndal's name in in April 2009. For years, he did not control the account (Runge, 2011a), but fortunately for Søvndal, the account remained inactive. Eventually, the account was signed over to Søvndal, just ahead of the general election in 2015. A few party leaders never established themselves on the platform during their leadership period, including Pia Kjaersgaard (DPP), Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen (RGA), and Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP), including her time as Prime Minister. In 2016, Thorning-Schmidt joined Twitter after she abandoned Danish politics and started working for the London based organisation, *Save the Children International*. Today, the current Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen (SDP) is the only party leader not on Twitter.

Party Leader	Facebook	Twitter	Leadership Period
Anders Samuelsen (LA)	07-01-2009	01-03-2009	2008 – 2019
Helle Thorning-Schmidt* (SDP)	28-02-2008	01-03-2016	2005 – 2015
Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen* (RGA)	08-05-2009	-	2007 – 2016
Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP)	17-03-2009	01-03-2009	2009 – 2019
Lene Espersen (CP)	07-04-2008	01-04-2014	2008 – 2011
Margrethe Vestager (SLP)	02-10-2008	01-01-2009	2007 – 2014
Pia Kjaersgaard* (DPP)	03-09-2008	01-11-2018	1995 – 2012
Villy Søvndal** (SPP)	19-02-2008	01-04-2009	2005 – 2012
Lars Barfoed (CP)	16-06-2010	01-05-2014	2011 – 2014

Annette Vilhelmsen (SPP)	24-03-2008	01-12-2014	2012 – 2014
Morten Østergaard (SLP)	03-08-2011	01-01-2009	2014 –
Pia Olsen Dyhr (SPP)	19-11-2008	01-08-2009	2014 –
Søren Pape Poulsen (CP)	12-08-2014	01-08-2014	2014 –
Kristian Thulesen Dahl (DPP)	21-09-2012	01-04-2017	2012 –
Uffe Elbæk (ALT)	12-12-2011	01-10-2009	2013 – 2020
Mette Frederiksen* (SDP)	12-03-2009	-	2015 –
Pernille Skipper (RGA)	27-08-2007	01-06-2012	2016 –
Alex Vanopslagh (LA)	06-06-2017	01-06-2013	2019 –
Jakob Ellemann-Jensen (LP)	04-05-2016	01-06-2010	2019 –
Pernille Vermund (NR)	13-11-2019	01-03-2009	2019 –

*Table 1: The party leaders' presence on Facebook and Twitter 2010 – 2019. \*No Twitter account at the time of leadership position.*

During the ten years, party leaders have expanded their presence on social media platforms to include other social media, such as Instagram and LinkedIn, but some of them also found their way to platforms like *YouTube*, *Flickr*, *Snapchat*, *Pinterest*, *Reddit*, and *TikTok*.

Today, most party leaders are present on mainstream social media platforms, i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Facebook has been the main platform for all party leaders in the past decade, and Twitter has been widely used by most party leaders. The notable exceptions have been the party leaders of the Social Democratic Party, first Helle Thorning-Schmidt and later Mette Frederiksen, the current Prime Minister, who have stayed away from the platform. Apart from Thorning-Schmidt's blogging for the election in 2005 and 2007, Thorning-Schmidt and Frederiksen have been the least present party leaders on social media platforms other than Facebook.

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	LinkedIn
Mette Frederiksen	Yes	No	Yes	No

Morten Østergaard	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Søren Pape Poulsen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pernille Vermund	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kristian Thulesen Dahl	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jakob Ellemann-Jensen	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pernille Skipper	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Uffe Elbæk	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pia Olsen Dyhr	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Alex Vanopslagh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Table 2: The party leaders on social media platforms, October 2019.*

In September 2019, after the general election, Frederiksen joined Instagram, using the handle @mette. The handle had been left dormant by another Instagram user for nine years, and it was handed over to Mette Frederiksen by Instagram. Instagram’s action came as a surprise for the dormant user, the news media, and the public. On social media, some people responded with dissatisfaction to the transfer of the handle by using the hashtag #NotMyMette (Ganderup, 2019), while the tabloid news media reported about a dodgy transfer process (Larsen, 2019; M. C. Madsen, 2019). Nevertheless, the matter was settled, and Frederiksen acknowledged the previous user by posting a photo of her along with a short text, “Meet Mette from Køge”, and a suggestion to follow her on her new Instagram handle. When Frederiksen started using the profile, mostly posting content similar to that on her Facebook page, she gained more than 10.000 followers in the first week. In less than a year, her account attracted more than 323.000 followers, making her the most popular Danish politician on Instagram<sup>7</sup>.

The last party leader to join Instagram was Kristian Thulesen Dahl (DPP), who joined the platform on October 15, 2019. In the late fall of 2019, all party leaders were present on Facebook and Instagram. All, except Mette Frederiksen, were on Twitter. Apart from three party leaders, the party leaders were also present on LinkedIn.

<sup>7</sup> I checked the number of followers on August 12, 2020.

### The Following: Follow Me

It is a simple, but powerful gesture to like a politician. For the user it is a statement of political affinity and beliefs. Liking a politician is not necessarily an easy choice for the users. Sometimes it comes with the price of friendships, on Facebook and elsewhere. Unfriending, or defriending, refers to the act of actively deselecting or deleting a friend on Facebook (Bode, 2016b). It is a real measure, which people use to sanitize their network on Facebook and the content in their timeline feed. Unfriending is the most extreme measure among similar actions, such as muting or blocking friends. Most people are not super interested in politics, at least not outside election season. Some refrain from making such political gestures out of fear of losing friends, stoking conflict among loved ones, or antagonizing neighbours or colleagues. Political gestures, such as a like of a politician, can lead to defriending.

For the politician, the individual like represents the support from a person who potentially share your political interest. At scale, the number of likes represents communication power. As Gerbaudo (2019c) wrote, “political influence is now measured in part through social media metrics: likes, followers, and shares”. Adding to this, Spierings and Jacobs (2014) observed that there is a relation between elite politicians’ visibility and voting effects, when compared to lesser known candidates. Number of followers adds to visibility and agenda-setting power. Size matters, and not surprisingly, there is an ongoing feud between Danish party leaders, between the leader of the opposition and the Prime Minister, for this visibility and agenda-setting power, which has often been expressed through the number of followers on Facebook.

Party Leader	2011*	2012	2013	2014	2015*	2016	2017	2018	2019*
Anders Samuelsen	6.572	11.498	14.978	30.967	61.175	90.531	95.777	93.909	91.819
Helle Thorning-Schmidt	130.336	141.454	144.276	155.328	191.066	-	-	-	-
Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen	58.462	71.537	85.006	96.646	121.989	149.487	150.569	149.620	-
Lars Løkke Rasmussen	93.631	112.452	116.852	137.569	176.652	197.055	202.784	202.591	208.329
Lene Espersen	11.665	11.515	11.828	13.968	-	-	-	-	-
Margrethe Vestager	30.860	35.567	36.508	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pia Kjaersgaard	18.457	25.010	42.624	73.376	122.910	136.276	138.181	136.366	138.106
Villy Søvndal	111.831	108.506	103.373	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lars Barfoed	5.052	5.528	7.095	10.830	-	-	-	-	-
Annette Vilhelmsen	311	1.532	6.606	6.742	-	-	-	-	-
Morten Østergaard	4.934	5.610	6.060	6.132	18.014	25.180	29.810	40.251	63.473

Pia Olsen Dyhr	1.287	1.861	7.058	10.730	28.517	47.921	58.315	63.256	71.723
Søren Pape Poulsen	-	-	-	-	26.021	35.271	38.829	39.526	45.799
Kristian Thulesen Dahl	-	1.616	7.911	12.974	36.040	59.311	68.370	70.696	71.958
Uffe Elbæk	716	6.945	8.773	11.011	17.427	46.882	55.696	55.523	56.960
Mette Frederiksen	18.428	20.518	22.889	25.197	30.172	58.381	67.649	69.841	101.998
Pernille Skipper	2.171	1.417	7.362	9.549	16.461	37.057	46.287	47.129	63.039
Alex Vanopslagh	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22.025
Jakob Ellemann-Jensen	943	1.583	2.305	4.555	7.165	7.253	8.155	9.228	16.133

*Table 3: The party leaders' followers on Facebook tallied in October of each year. Years marked with an asterisk was an election year. Grey numbers indicate the number of likes before or after the leadership role and with the politician still being a Member of Parliament. Years marked by a dash, indicates that the party leader is not or no longer a Member of Parliament.*

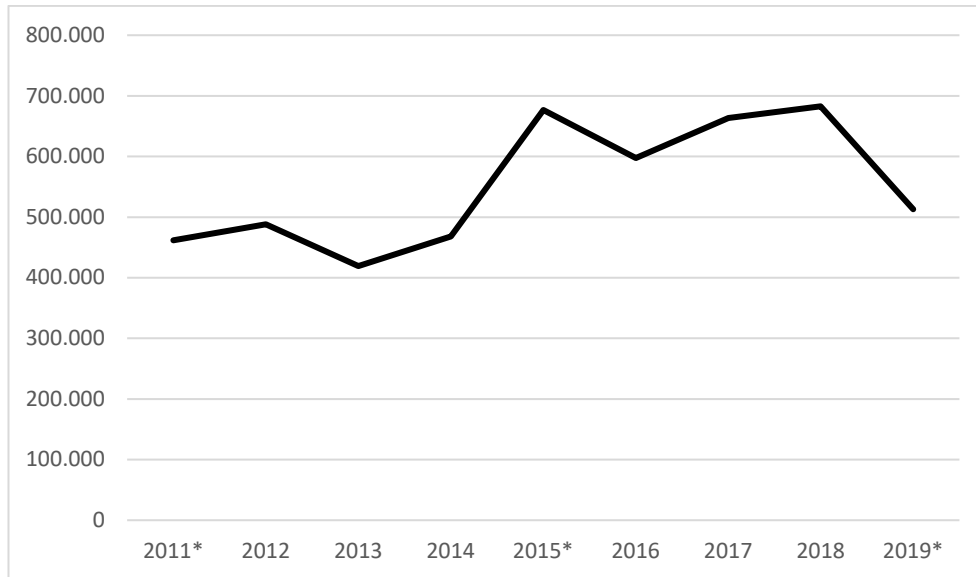
Followers matters in politics – but it takes a long time to build a solid follower base. It is rare for Danish politicians to have more than 100.000 followers. After the general election in 2019, only four Members of Parliament had more, and only one was a party leader, though not for long. They were Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP) with 204.777 followers, Inger Støjberg (LP) with 140.569 followers, Pia Kjaersgaard (DPP) with 137.221 followers, and Zenia Stampe (SLP) with 103.257 followers. Mette Frederiksen (SDP), who won the election, came in fifth with 86.550 followers. Only 30 of the Members of Parliament had more than 20.000 followers after the general election. The average number of followers for the elected Members of Parliament was 14.142, but more perhaps more interesting, the median number was 5.820 followers.

Name	Followers on Facebook
Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP)*	204.777
Inger Støjberg (LP)	140.569
Pia Kjaersgaard (DPP)	137.221
Zenia Stampe (SLP)	103.257
Mette Frederiksen (SDP)*	86.550
Kristian Thulesen Dahl (DPP)*	71.830

Pia Olsen Dyhr (SPP)*	69.759
Peter Skaarup (DPP)	63.387
Pernille Skipper (RGA)*	60.891
Morten Østergaard (SLP)*	60.588
Dan Jørgensen (SDP)	57.916
Uffe Elbæk (ALT)*	57.022
Jacob Mark (SPP)	55.953
Mattias Tesfaye (SDP)	48.733
Søren Pape Poulsen (CP)*	45.092

*Table 4: Members of Parliament: Top 15 members of Parliament with most followers on Facebook after the general election in 2019. Party leaders marked with an asterisk.*

As the table above demonstrates, most of the party leaders are among the top 15 members of Parliament with most followers on Facebook. Two of the party leaders are missing from the list. The first, Pernille Vermund (NB) ran her election campaign on a Facebook profile, showing no public information of the number of friends or followers. Anders Samuelsen (LA) was not elected and the party, the Liberal Alliance, had to find a new party leader. Eventually, they elected Alex Vanopslagh (LA), who had 8.887 followers after the election. In the Liberal Party, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who from 2009 to October 2019 had gained 208.329 followers on Facebook, resigned as party leader. After a short transition with Kristian Jensen as interim party leader, Jakob Ellemann-Jensen was elected party leader for the Liberal Party. In October 2019, Ellemann-Jensen had 16.133 followers on Facebook, or roughly 7,7 percent of Løkke Rasmussen's following.



*Illustration 3: The party leader's combined number of followers on Facebook 2011-2019.*

Party leaders do not always have the largest followers base compared to other party leaders or to other politicians from their own party. This may become a problem, because other candidates for the party leadership may be able to set a different course for the party. In the Danish Peoples' Party, former party leader, Pia Kjærsgaard continues to set the agenda for the party on Facebook. Kjærsgaard resigned as party leader in 2012, but she still has twice the number of followers as current party leader, Kristian Thulesen Dahl. Currently, vice party leader in the Liberal Party, Inger Støjberg dwarfs newly elected party leader, Jakob Ellemann-Jensen in terms of followers on Facebook. While Ellemann-Jensen and Støjberg may be politically aligned, Støjberg, who is a hardliner on value based policies, such as immigration, has a proven track record of using her presence on Facebook to set the political agenda. Former party leader and Prime Minister, but still a prominent Member of Parliament, Lars Løkke Rasmussen outnumbers both, and could use this prominence to either endorse the new party leader and his political visions or reject them.

### **Challenges**

All parties in parliament experience leadership challenges and changes. When parties lose seats in elections, party leaders are challenged and have to resign. In the past, a change of party leader meant an adjustment of the political direction and a fresh new face, whose communication was not burdened by political trivialities, disappointment among voters, or scandals. New party leaders could start with a clean slate. Incoming party leaders were selected among established prominent politicians, well-known among the voters. They were usually well versed in the inner workings skilled in communicating via mass media, which in turn supplied their audience. In the past decade, social

media platforms have added another dimension to leadership change. Building a substantial presence and reach the level of popularity on platforms equalling that of the previous party leaders takes a long time, lots of effort and hard work, and often loads of money, or a new election campaign that can heighten the attention of the party leader. Today, to no surprise, loss of followers matters a lot.

The Conservative Party had some rough years in the beginning of the decade. At the end of 2010, Lene Espersen had lost the confidence of the Conservative group in Parliament. Espersen resigned and was replaced by Lars Barfoed, who was then replaced in 2014 by Søren Pape Poulsen.

Following the general election in 2015, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, who had lost the bid for a second term for her government, stepped down as Prime Minister and resigned as the party leader for the Social Democratic Party. On Facebook, Thorning-Schmidt had reached 190.074 followers on election day, leading the contender Lars Løkke Rasmussen by 15.000 followers, and making her the most popular politician on social media so far. Curiously, although Thorning-Schmidt had been blogging for the election in 2007 and 2011, Facebook had become the only social media platform she used, and her successor as party leader, Mette Frederiksen was approaching social media in the same manner, though with a considerably smaller reach of 30.172 followers on Facebook.

Following the general election in 2019, the party leader of the Liberal Alliance, Anders Samuelsen, lost his seat in parliament, and was replaced by newly elected Alex Vanopslagh as party leader. Samuelsen had become a very active user on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn, and over the years he had become one of the most popular party leaders on Facebook. On election day in 2019, Samuelsen had reached 93.092 followers, whereas upcoming party leader, Alex Vanopslagh was followed by 8.887 on Facebook.

In the Liberal Party, former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen was challenged by the party vice chairman Kristian Jensen in what had been an ongoing power struggle inside the party. Having been challenged by Jensen previously, Løkke Rasmussen was bitterly opposed to Jensen taking over the party leadership. Eventually on August 31, 2019, following a tense meeting in the party executive committee, Jensen announced that he would withdraw his candidacy for party leaders if Løkke Rasmussen resigned. Angered by this play, which apparently had the support of the executive committee, Løkke Rasmussen stepped down as party leader immediately, leaving the party without a leader (Klose Jensen, 2019). Kristian Jensen was then appointed interim party leader until an extraordinary party convention in September



2019. At the convention, the Liberal Party elected Jakob Ellemann-Jensen as the leader of the party.

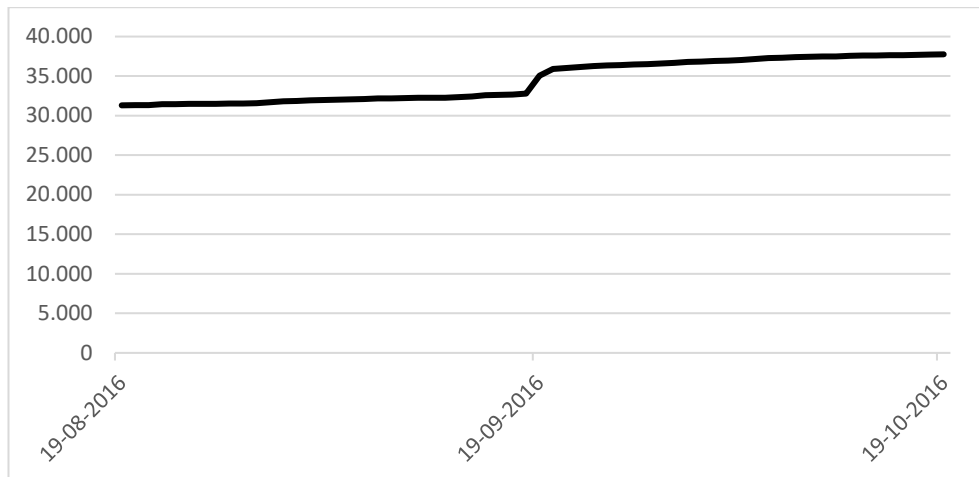
Later in 2019, the founder and party leader of the Alternative, Uffe Elbæk announced that he would step down as party leader. With only four MPs left, the party barely made it past the electoral threshold in the general election in 2019. Considering that the party had won nine seats in the general election in 2015 and had been joined by a renegade Member of Parliament from the Social Democratic Party, Pernille Schnoor, the election result was a major disappointment for the remaining Members of Parliament. In a string of national ballots among its members, the party elected the former Member of Parliament, Josefine Fock as its new party leader on February 1, 2020. The decision was unusual and controversial for a variety of reasons. In all other parties it is custom that the party leader is an elected Member of Parliament. Adding to the controversy, three of the four Members of Parliament, including Uffe Elbæk, were dissatisfied with the election of Fock as the new party leader. Previously, the majority of the remaining Members of Parliament had been part of an ongoing power struggle within the party. Eventually, they decided to leave the party and establish an independent group in parliament, thus leaving the party with only one Member of Parliament.

Being part of a government can be very taxing for parties. That was the case for the Socialist People's Party, which had joined the Social Democratic Party and the Social Liberal Party in a coalition government led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt from 2011 to 2015. Socialist People's Party's participation in the coalition quickly proved less than successful and the government's policies were substantially different from what the party had envisioned and promised its voters. Party members were dissatisfied with the government policies, the absence of Villy Søvndal, who had become Foreign Secretary, from the domestic scene, and adding to the calamities, opinion polls showed that the party was losing support among its voters. Having been the proponent for the coalition government, party leader Villy Søvndal decided that the party needed a new leadership. The leadership contest did not work out as Søvndal had planned. His preferred candidate, Astrid Krag, a minister in the cabinet and supporter of the coalition government, lost to contender Annette Vilhelmsen. Krag and several other Members of Parliament, who supported the government, eventually left the party, most joined the Social Democratic Party, one the Social Liberal Party. In January 2014, Vilhelmsen pulled the Socialist People's Party from the government and resigned as party leader. The party's current leader, Pia Olsen Dyhr was elected in February 2014.

Not all leadership changes are dramatic and controversial. In the past decade, three peaceful leadership transitions have taken place. The Red-Green Alliance, which does not have a party leader but a political speaker, has a regulatory system which requires all Members of Parliament, Members of the European Parliament, the party's mayors, as well as party officials to rotate out of office after being elected or employed for more than seven years, depending on when elections are called. This rule, which is more principled than strategic, was applied to the Red-Green Alliance once in past decade, in May 2016, when Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen resigned as the party's political speaker and was replaced by Pernille Skipper. On May 4, 2016, Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen had 147.129 followers on her Facebook page, whereas Pernille Skipper had 25.804 followers. The cost of the leadership change was 121.325 followers on Facebook. Four months later, Skipper had increased her number of followers by 7.000. In a rare attempt to add to the number of followers, Schmidt-Nielsen shared an endorsement of Skipper on her Facebook page on September 19, 2016. On the day of Schmidt-Nielsen's endorsement, Pernille Skipper increased her followers by 2.200 new followers, and in the following weeks, she got more than 5.000 new followers.



*Illustration 4: Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen endorses the new party leader, Pernille Skipper (RGA)*



*Illustration 5: Pernille Skipper's number of followers on Facebook, when she was endorsed by Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen on September 19, 2016.*

Another peaceful leadership transition took place in September 2012, where Pia Kjærsgaard resigned as part of a planned leadership change in the Danish People's Party. Kjærsgaard, who had been party leader since the party's

creation in 1995, was replaced by another of the founders, Kristian Thulesen Dahl. After her resignation, Pia Kjærsgaard remained a strong political factor inside the party, and a prominent figure in the public and on Facebook. When Kjærsgaard stepped down as party leader, she had 24.199 followers on Facebook, which placed her in the lower half compared to the other party leaders.

Name	Followers on Facebook
Lars Barfoed (CP)	5.457
Anders Samuelsen (LA)	11.370
Pia Kjærsgaard (DPP)	24.199
Margrethe Vestager (SLP)	35.551
Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen (RGA)	71.328
Villy Søvndal (SPP)	108.908
Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP)	113.208
Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP)	141.462

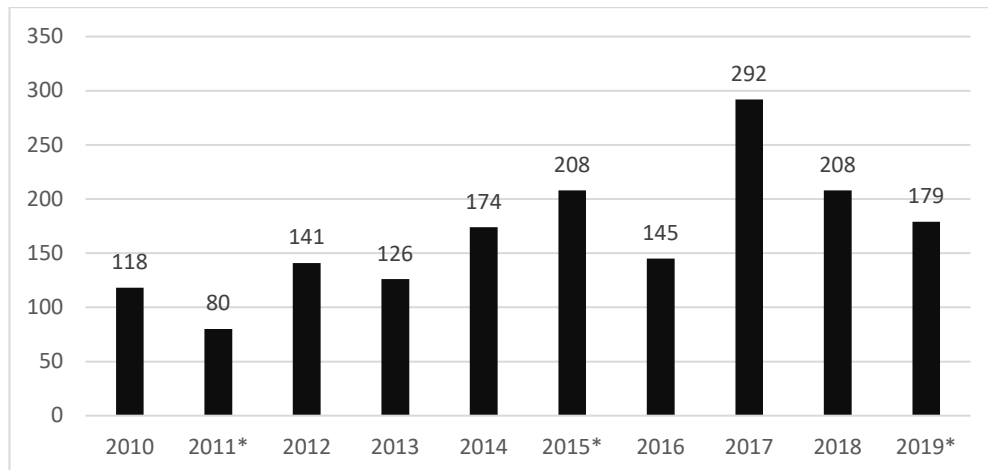
*The party leaders on Facebook, September 2012.*

The Danish People's Party's Members of Parliament have been never considered front runners on social media platforms, but among them, Kjærsgaard was the absolute most popular politician on Facebook, and she still is. In September 2012, only 11 of the party's 22 Members of Parliament were on Facebook, and the newly elected party leader, Kristian Thulesen Dahl was not one of them. Their combined number of followers on Facebook only reached 32.009 followers. Kjærsgaard's share of followers was 75,6 percent.

Finally, in 2014, the party leader of Social Liberal Party and a key member of the coalition government led by Thorning-Schmidt (SDP), Margrethe Vestager was appointed commissioner in the European Commission, and her second in command, Morten Østergaard was chosen as party leader by the party's parliamentarian group, quite as expected. At the time Margrethe Vestager had 41.270 followers on Facebook, Østergaard had a little more than 6.000 followers. But perhaps more importantly, in the Danish Twittersphere Vestager had become known as the *Queen of Twitter*. She was among the first movers, she had developed a distinct rhetorical style, some say it resembled Japanese Haikus, and she was the most popular Danish politician on Twitter with 60.642 tweeps. In comparison, Morten Østergaard only had 13.875 tweeps.

## Speaking Volumes

The volume of the party leaders' posts on Facebook 2010 – 2019 has increased over the years in general, but with an uneven pattern for the years 2015 to 2018. In 2015, volume was up, then it dropped in 2016. In 2017, volume increases dramatically, and then it dropped again in 2018 and 2019. The posting volume for 2010 – 2019 is seen in the bar chart below.



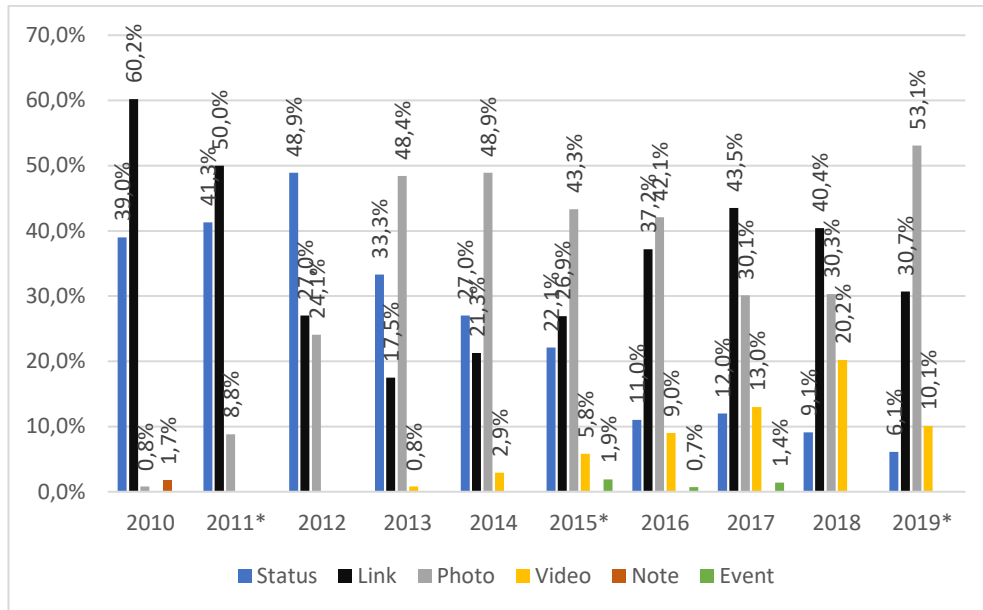
*Illustration 6: The volume of the party leaders' posts on Facebook 2010 – 2019. Years marked with an asterisk were election years.*

To understand the shifts in volume, there are three elements in play. The first element is the new party in parliament for 2015. The Alternative ran a successful election campaign mostly on social media platforms, which was based on frequent posting to keep the party and its candidates visible on the different social media platforms and in the news media. The party's leader, Uffe Elbæk was one of the very active politicians on social media, like Facebook. In the first years in parliament, he continues to post frequently, but in 2017 his posting volume quadruples, from 17 posts in 2016 to 93 posts in 2017. The reason for the dramatic increase – with more than 3 posts per day – is the upcoming local elections in November 2017. In 2018, his posting drops to a more moderate 39 posts for the month of October. In 2019, Uffe Elbæk decided to stop all activities on Facebook and move to a new social media platform called *Duckling* (Elbæk, 2019b). Elbæk only has one post for the entire month. The second element of influence on the numbers is the newly formed minority government led by Lars Løkke Rasmussen from the Liberal Party. The minority government was formed after the general election in 2015 with the support of the Conservative Party, the Liberal Alliance, and the Danish Peoples' Party. While celebrating the election win in 2015, the parties were trying to use their support for the minority government by influencing the government's policies. During the next year, it becomes clear that the government and the parties supporting it are not aligned. In October

2016, when the minority government is presenting its policies and upcoming legislation, the opposition are very responsive on social media and in the news media. The parties supporting the government, frustrated by their limited political influence, limit their communication. Bearing Walgrave and Van Aelst's (2016) observations in mind, that governments and their supporters have the burden of responsibility, and the opposition is free to attribute blame, this is not surprising. By 2017, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Alliance have joined the Liberal Party in government. The Danish Peoples' Party got the offer, but declined, instead they increased their influence on government policies. The third interesting element influencing posting volume is the leadership changes in 2019. As described above, two of the decade's longest serving party leaders, Anders Samuelsen (LA) and Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who both were very active on social media, are replaced by Alex Vanopslagh (LA) and Jakob Ellemann-Jensen. Despite their many other qualities, it would be surprising if they from the beginning would be as active on Facebook as their predecessors.

### **New modes of communication**

Adding to the understanding of the increased posting volume are the changes in available posting types on Facebook. In first years of the decade, the dominating posting types were link posts and status posts (text only). From 2011, communication on Facebook begin to be more visual. From 2011 to 2013, photo posts, which contain everything from photos to a range of different types of graphics, are increasingly used by the party leaders. Adding to this development in 2013, the party leaders begin to use of video posts. This growth continues when live streaming video is made available via Facebook Mentions accounts (pages only) in august 2015 (Constine, 2015) and to the wider public in 2016 (Lavrusik, 2016). The shifts in the different posting types can be seen in the bar chart below.



*The party leaders' types of posts on Facebook 2010 – 2019. Years marked with an asterisk were election years.*

The decline of the status update is as remarkable, as is the growth of both photo and video posts. In many of the years, the text based status updates perform better than the rest of the post types. Only in 2014, 2016, and 2019 is the status update surpassed by the photo post type (see the table below).

	Status	Link	Photo	Video
2010	105	128	120	0
2011*	1.126	729	780	0
2012	281	153	25	262
2013	556	72	283	166
2014	349	194	430	201
2015*	1.419	662	882	417
2016	691	411	737	418
2017	881	496	705	640
2018	1.013	488	614	392
2019*	2.086	678	2.118	1.189

*Interactions for different Facebook post types from 2010 to 2019, based on the median values of the interactions.*

The conventional wisdom of visual content is that is more appealing and more engaging. While this is not always the case, at least when it comes down to the amounts of interactions they generate, visual communication on social media allow communication to become multi-layered and multi-faceted. In the beginning of this decade, my studies show that images were often used to supplement or support the text update, in effect adding a visual focus to a salient political issue. Increasingly, the texts became secondary to the visual communication, which included posting selfies, portraits, screen grabs, party posters or banners, or different forms of memetic content with an increased focus on the politicians' personal attributes rather than the political issues. With possibility of posting video to the platform, another and distinctly different layer of visual communication was added to political communication. In the beginning, the post were mostly campaign videos or pre-produced videos, but when Facebook afforded the users to post live streaming video, new forms of interactions developed. While party leaders did not respond frequently to comments to their status updates, presumably because responses to comments were essentially only visible to the commenter and few other users. On live streaming video, the politicians could now engage in live *Questions and Answers sessions*, which allowed the party leaders to answer questions to a wider audience, even the tough questions.

### Content Analysis

While the volume of the party leaders' posts has increased in the past decade, the issues they present and discuss in their posts have been remarkably stable. In most years, the five most mentioned policy areas were The Danish Realm and Institutions, including issues of parliament, government, and the constitutional frameworks, followed by Labour and Employment, Foreign Policy, the Economy and the Financial Act, and on a shared fifth place was Justice and Police and immigration from 2014.

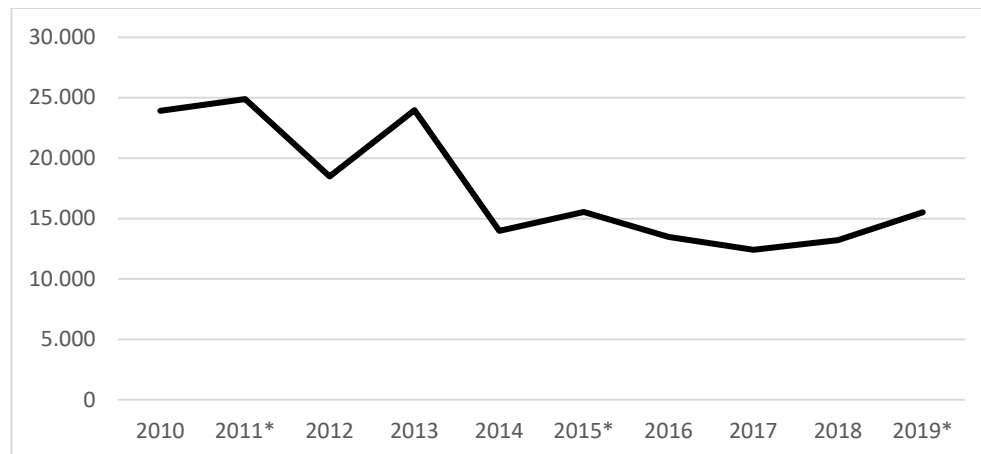
	2010	2011*	2012	2013	2014	2015*	2016	2017	2018	2019*
Economy and the Financial Act	3,3%	10,2%	6,5%	6,6%	3,7%	7,4%	1,8%	4,3%	1,7%	10,8%
Industry, Business and Financial Affairs	3,3%	1,7%	6,5%	8,8%	4,7%	4,6%	0,0%	4,3%	6,8%	0,0%
Taxation	0,0%	0,0%	0,9%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	3,6%	1,2%	0,8%	1,4%
Environment and Climate Change	0,8%	1,7%	0,9%	1,1%	2,8%	2,3%	4,5%	3,4%	7,1%	4,1%
Labour and Employment	14,9%	20,3%	28,7%	28,6%	29,0%	26,9%	20,5%	13,5%	15,5%	23,6%
Social and Welfare Policies	0,0%	0,0%	0,9%	2,2%	0,9%	1,1%	0,9%	0,5%	2,3%	2,7%

Immigration and integration	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	8,4%	3,4%	5,4%	7,5%	7,9%	7,4%
Health Care	5,8%	0,0%	0,0%	2,2%	0,9%	0,0%	1,8%	1,4%	3,7%	2,7%
Education and Research	4,1%	3,4%	2,8%	2,2%	2,8%	4,0%	8,0%	7,2%	5,4%	2,7%
Church and Religion	0,8%	1,7%	0,9%	3,3%	0,9%	0,6%	1,8%	3,6%	2,0%	0,0%
Culture and Media	3,3%	3,4%	4,6%	2,2%	1,9%	1,7%	2,7%	3,1%	3,4%	1,4%
Justice and Police	10,7%	6,8%	2,8%	1,1%	4,7%	4,0%	11,6%	8,2%	8,2%	2,7%
Defence and Security	5,0%	3,4%	5,6%	0,0%	0,0%	0,6%	0,9%	3,1%	1,1%	0,0%
Infrastructure Policies	3,3%	0,0%	0,0%	3,3%	1,9%	0,0%	0,0%	1,4%	1,7%	0,0%
Foreign Policy**	11,6%	3,4%	7,4%	5,5%	13,1%	10,9%	8,0%	8,7%	11,3%	10,8%
The Danish Realm and Institutions	33,1%	44,1%	31,5%	33,0%	24,3%	32,6%	28,6%	28,4%	21,2%	29,7%

*The party leaders' issues 2010-2019. \*Election year. \*\*Foreign Policy includes the Nordic Council and the European Union.*

### The Party Leaders and the News Media

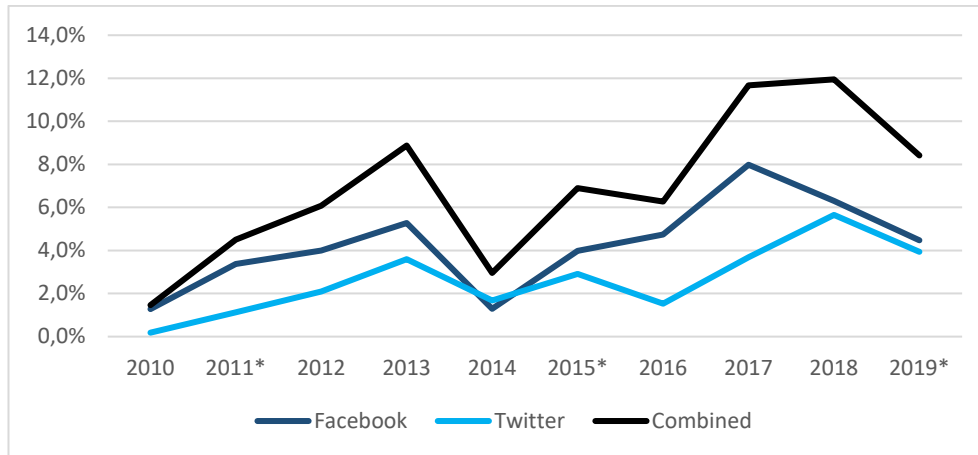
The party leaders use of social media platforms are often discussed as a way to bypass traditional news media, and increasingly, the party leaders use of social media has also become a source for news reporting. In general, the overall volume of news media reporting mentioning the party leaders has dropped in the past decade, which is expressed in the graph below,



*Illustration 7: The combined volume of mentions of the party leaders in the Danish news media 2010 – 2019 in the corresponding time frame. Data source: Infomedias.*

At the same time, news reporting which includes mentions related to their presence on Facebook or Twitter has increased. The combined volume of mentions of the party leaders in the Danish news media 2010 – 2019 in the corresponding periods surrounding the opening of the parliament declined over the years, yet in those years the news media have increased their mentions of the party leaders on social media platforms.





*The share of mentions of party leaders and social media platforms in the Danish news media 2010 – 2019. Years marked with an asterisk were election years. Data source: Infomedia.*

The share of mentions of party leaders and social media platforms in the Danish news media 2010 – 2019 is revealing. First, the growth of mentions indicates that an increased transference of salience from the party leaders' post on social media platforms to the media agenda occurs. This can partly be explained by the increase in the volume of posts, but in the end, it seems that news media reporting increasingly is relying on using social media as a source rather than journalists asking the party leaders questions. Whether this is caused by a shift in news values or production modes of the news media is not clear, but from the perspective of the party leaders, presence on social media is worth the effort. Second, not all news media reporting is based on politicians' won posts on social media. Often news reports will use comments made about the party leaders on social media from other users, sometimes including their opponents. Curiously, as an example, none of the party leaders have a presence on Twitter, yet the news media have often used the platform to collect news or comments about them. Third, contrary to conventional wisdom, Twitter is not the main source of attention. Apart from 2014, Facebook was the main source for news reporting from social media platforms.

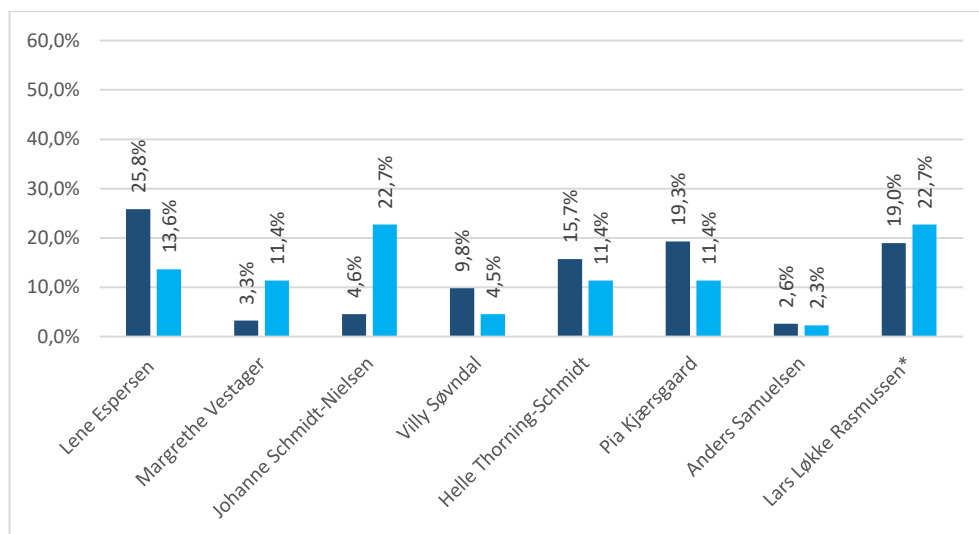
### **The Prime Minister in the News**

Like other forms of agenda-setting, the Prime Minister is often the most visible party leader in news media reporting where social media platforms are used as the source of news. Danish politics is no exception.

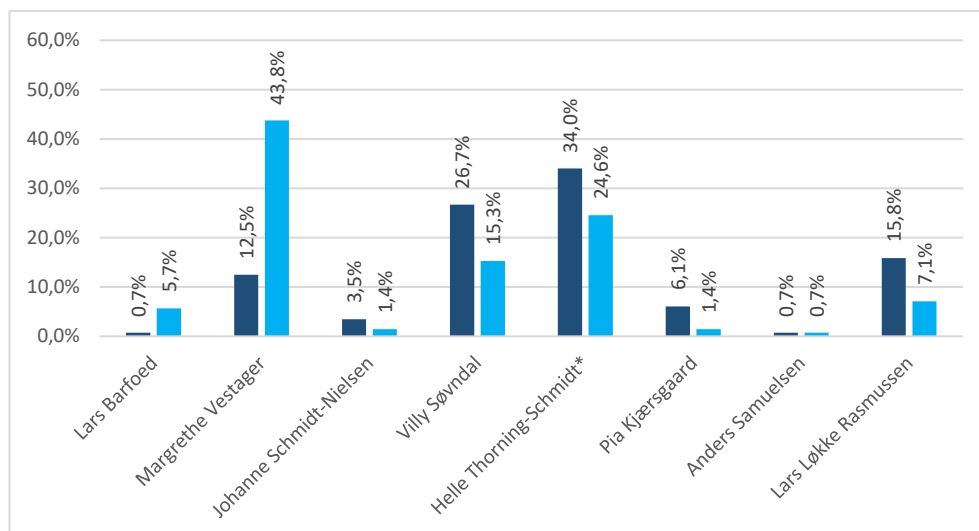
The Prime Minister is considered the most important and influential politician, and thus the Prime Minister commands the greatest visibility. Usually, the next in line is the leader of the opposition. In general, this has also been the case for news reporting based on content from social media platforms.

In the past decade, there were however notable exceptions in 2011, where the party leader from the Conservative People's Party, Lene Espersen, was swamped in an internal contest for the party leadership. And then again in 2013, where Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt only posted three times on Facebook and because Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP) was very active and engulfed in a scandal related to his chairmanship of the international NGO 3xGI based in Seoul, South Korea. In the following series of graphs, news media reporting based on content from Facebook is marked with a dark blue colour, and content from Twitter is marked with a light blue colour. The Prime Minister is marked with an asterisk.

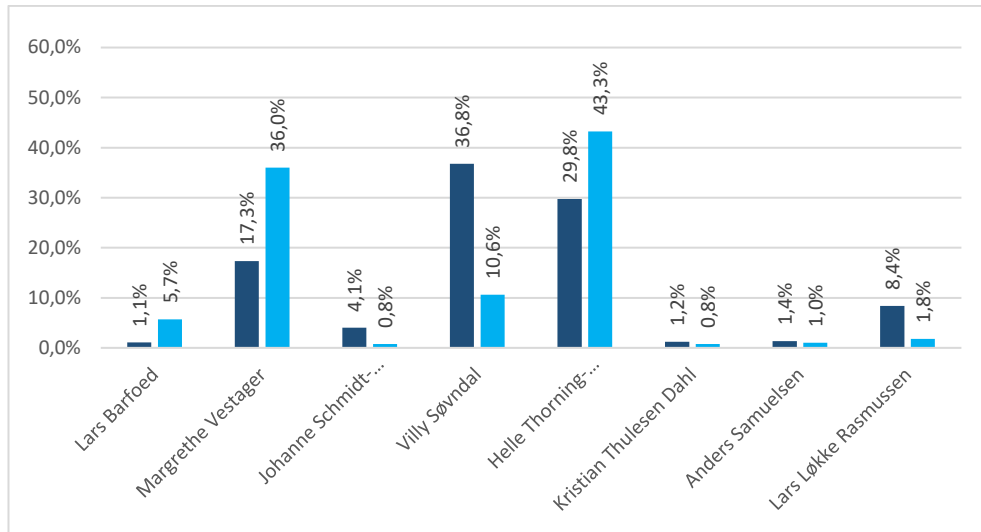
### 2010



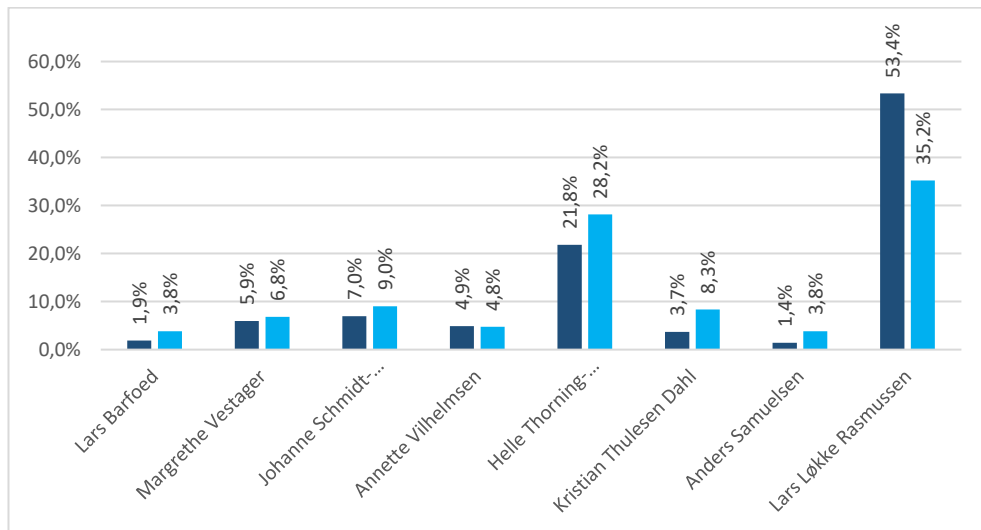
### 2011



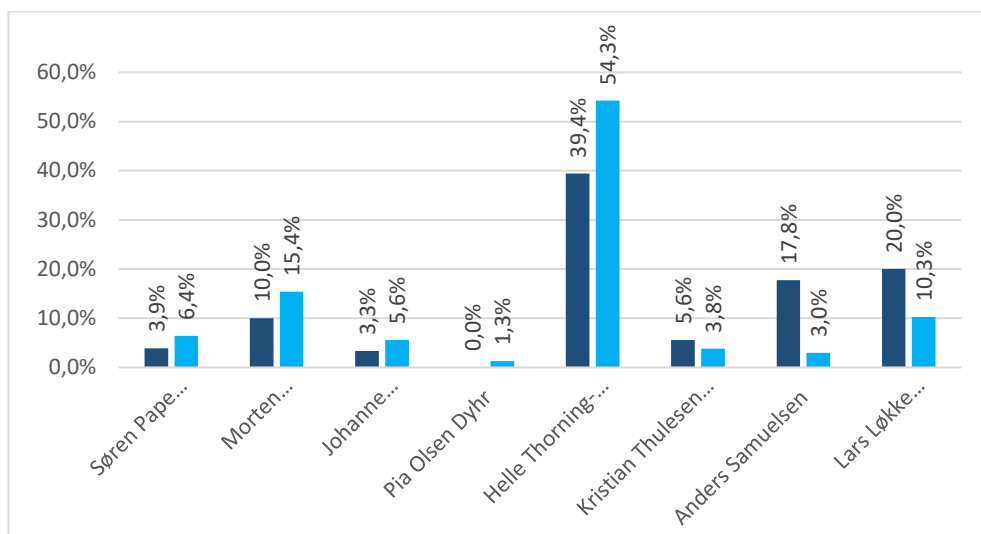
### 2012



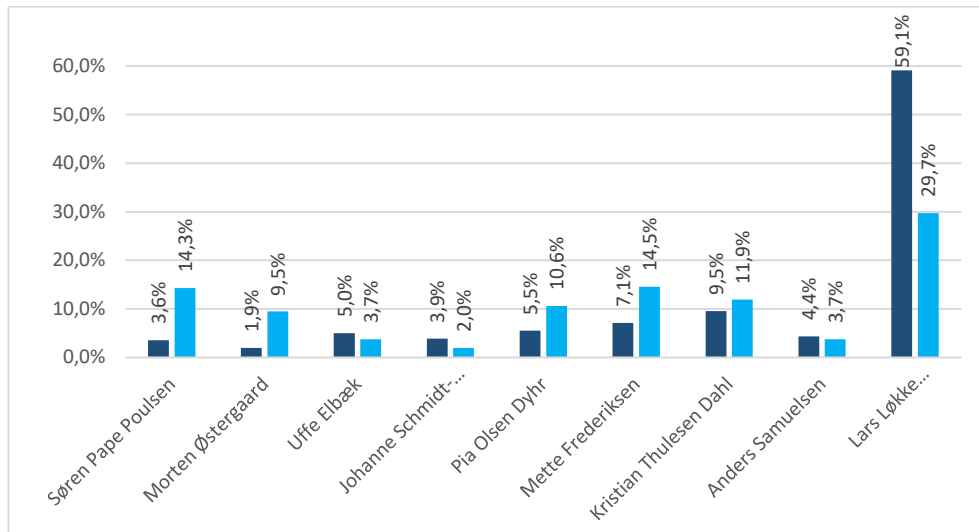
2013



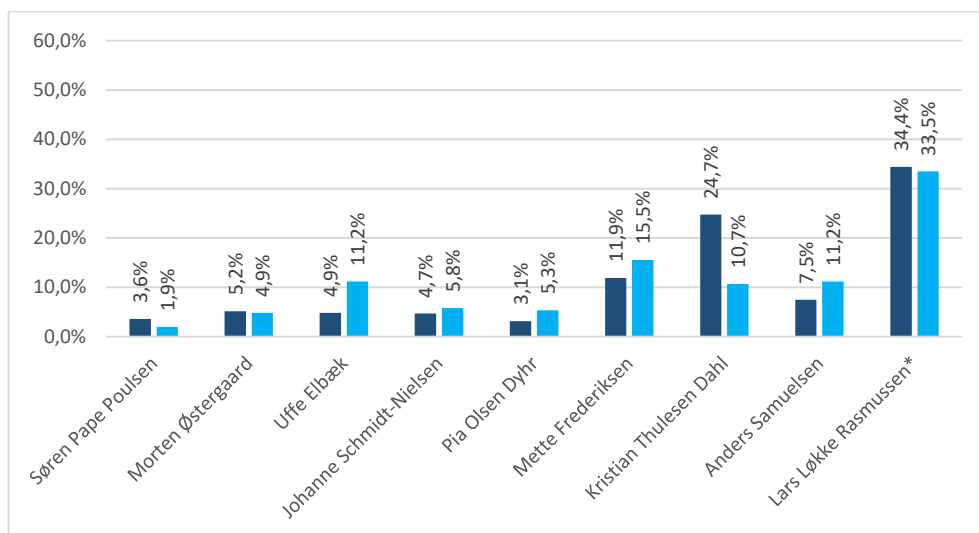
2014



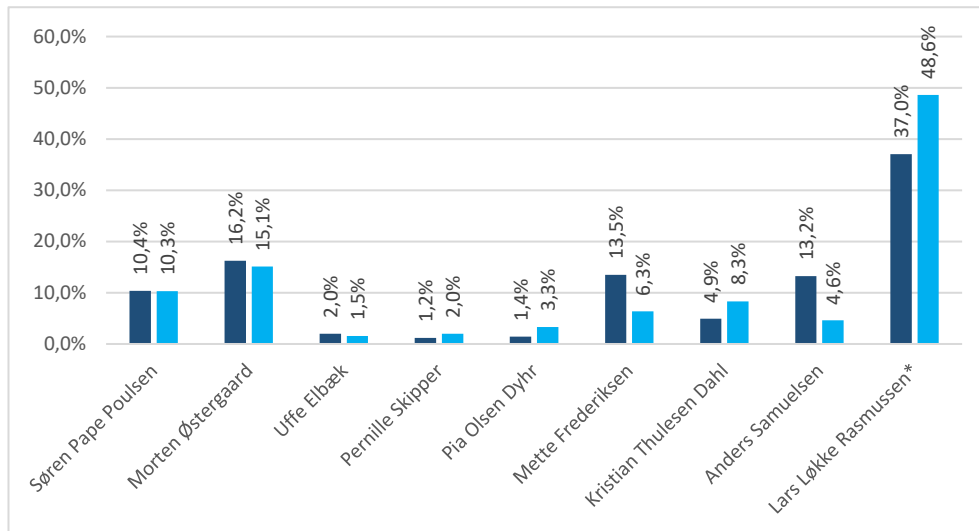
2015



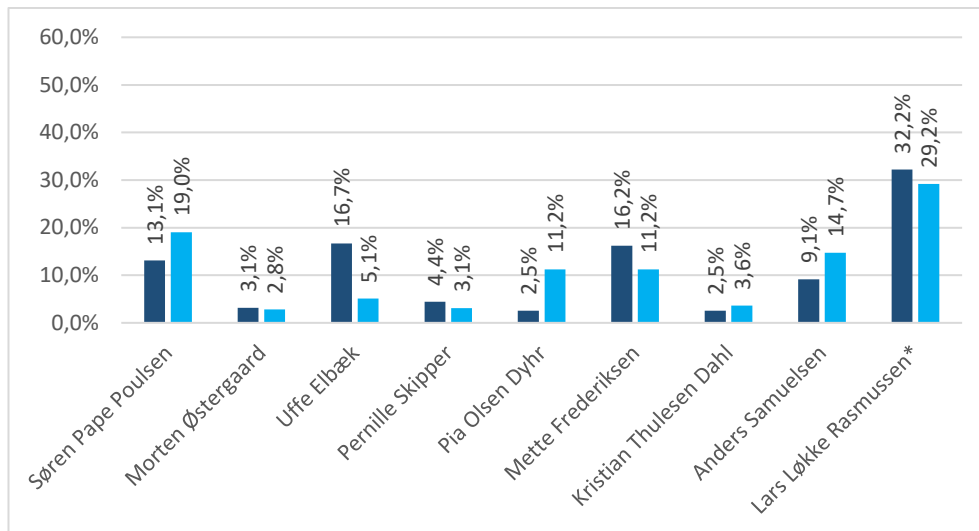
2016



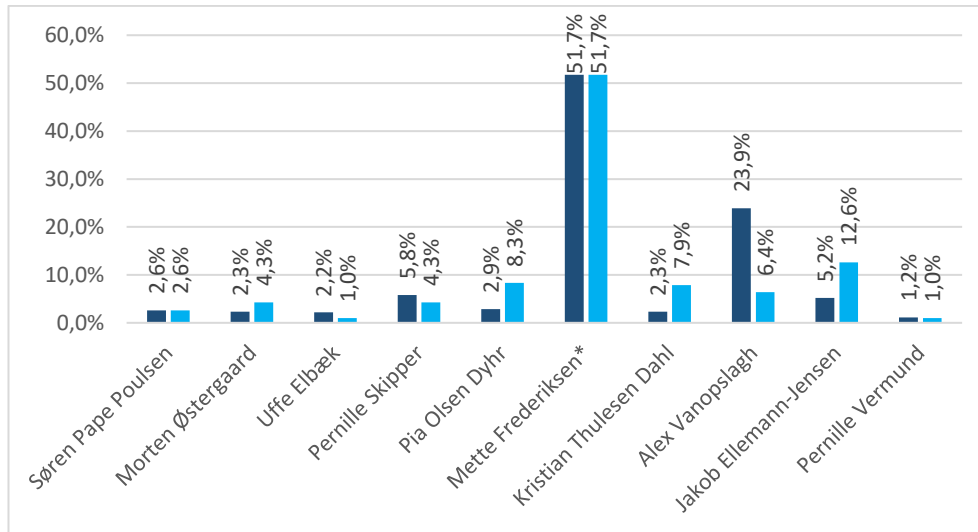
2017



2018



2019



The charts from 2010 to 2019 illustrate the party leader share of mentions in news media reports. Data source: Infomedia.

### Image is Something

One of the interesting finds in the data from the party leader's post, is the increased sharing of photos. The increase is interesting by itself, since it shows how important the use of digital photos has become for the framing of issues and candidate attributes. It is also telling of how social media platforms increasingly affords complex communication of multi-layered messages. Even when photos at a surface level may seem secondary, inferior, generic, or even meaningless related to the content of the text, photos often become the overall consistent staying message of social media posts. To stay on message.

Previously, John Corner (Corner, 2000) has used Goffman's powerful metaphor of stage, where the actors' performance depend on their position on the stage, front stage, or back stage. (Goffman, 1959), to describe how politicians try to control the images from the three spheres, the back stage, personal or private space. On social media platforms, the lines between the spheres become more and more blurred, and to some extent it is meaningless to speak of a personal or private sphere. In politics today, every photo is staged. Selected. Composed and cropped. To speak of a metaphorical back-stage only makes sense insofar photos are taken without the politicians' consent or are leaked, and then become part of some personal political scandal, where paparazzi like photos are part of the reporting in tabloid news media.

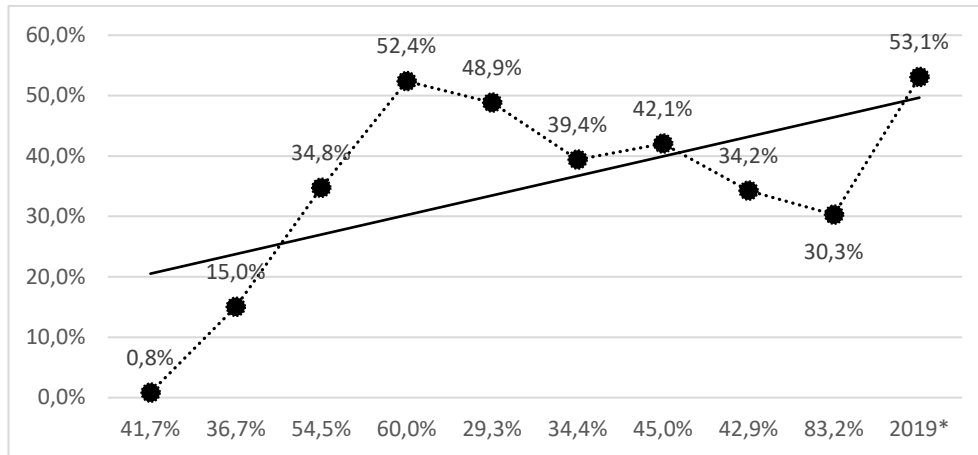
Social media platforms and the camera phone have changed this (Villi, 2015). In its most personalized form, the selfie (Frosh, 2015), the politicians become both the creator and the object of the photo, and invariably this leads to an

increase in the personalization. But even photos taken by another than the politicians themselves, are increasingly centred on the personal image bite (Bucy & Grabe, 2007), in which the personal is situated in a social or political setting. In a sense, this is not new. In the early forms of the permanent campaign, politicians treated every possible event as a photo opportunity, which then could be turned into image bite media coverage. The classic example is of politicians walking past photographers in front of the cameras, waving to non-existent crowds behind the photographers.

On social media, sharing symbolic images of issues and mixed with person centred photos, situated in a social or political setting, may increase authenticity of the political message, but this authenticity also becomes an “appeal to authenticity of experience”, which according to Bolter and Grusin “is what brings the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy together” (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). Adding to this, sharing photos on social media platforms instantaneously becomes a matter of sharing the personal attributes of the politician, as it is a matter of sharing the policies related to the issue. And perhaps more important, increasingly the personal is in the foreground, whereas the political becomes just another setting for the personal. This is seen in the image composition, but is also obvious in the message composition, where the photo is just as important, if not more, as the text. On platforms like Instagram, photos take the front seat. So too on Facebook, where photos sometimes become far more important than text, e.g. when photos accompanying text are popped in theatre mode. With an increased mediated presence on social media platforms that centres on the personal, politicians reconstruct the political message to be just as much about the personal attributes as being about the political issues, and in doing so politics become even more mediatized (Villi & Stocchetti, 2011).

## Methods

In this part of the case, I have reused the dataset of the party leaders’ Facebook posts 2010 to 2019, but with a focus on the posts containing photos. Over the years, the party leaders posted a total 1.671 posts on Facebook, and of those posts, 614 were photo posts, or 36,7 percent of the total number of posts. As seen in the previous section, the overall volume of the photo post type on the party leaders’ Facebook pages increased from 2010 to 2019. The drop in 2015 was caused by the leadership changes following the general election. Eventually, when the new party leaders were settled, the volume of photos continued to grow. The share of the photo type also continues to grow, as the platform have made it easier to post photos. The total growth from 2010 from 0,8 percent in of the total posts in 2010 to 53,1 percent in 2019.



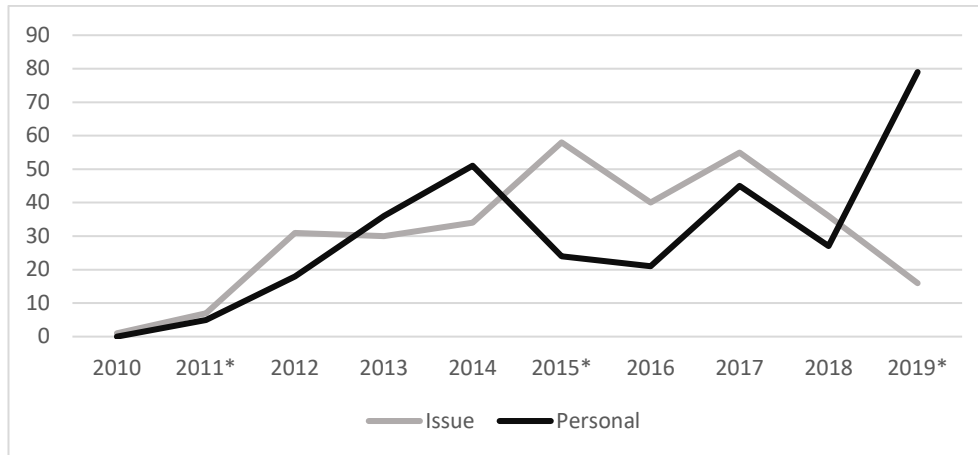
*The share of the photo post type in the party leaders' Facebook posts 2010 – 2019. The solid line shows the trend line as a linear regression. Years marked with an asterisk were election years.*

These posts were organised according to if the photos contain explicit references or representations of the party leader or not. As such, it was not important if a photo was a specific image type, e.g., a selfie, portrait, group portrait, screen grab, graphic, photos of posters, or different forms of memes, but rather a matter of if the photos referenced the party leader. Based on the dataset, the images from the photo post types were collected, and then split into two groups. The first group contained the posts which referenced the party leader, the second group contained the photos which referenced other issues.

### **Findings**

Initially, the increase of the party leaders use of photos was closely related to expansions of Facebook's affordances. In 2010, the use of photos increased in general, but over the years, the character of the photos has changed. In the beginning, the party leaders posted photos with objects directly related to the issues at hand. Later, the party leaders became the central element in the photo. In 2019, the personal photo peaked at a share of 83,2 percent of the photos. The development can be seen in the graph below.





*Illustration 8: Party leaders sharing photos on Facebook, 2010 - 2019.*

The shared photo may vary format, e.g., a selfie, a snapshot, a group photo, or a personal portrait, in settings where the location often becomes a backdrop for image of the person, and events become the opportune moments to share a photo of the party.

Some party leaders still post purely issue related photos, but the majority are now posting photos in which they are the main feature of the image. Some of the images appear to take the form of generic selfies, with the person as the absolute centre of the image. While this may seem to bland or ordinary, the images become stronger when they relate to the texts in the posts. But increasingly, images are used for cleverly constructed multi-layered storytelling, which address the issue at hand as well as situating the politician in the context. In a sense, the images become narratives of their own, but they are also efficient illustrations for the issue in the posts.

A good example of a party leader, who has excelled in sharing the personal photo, is current Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen. In almost all her photos, she is the focal point, she is situated in easily recognizable setting, surrounded by either stereotypical characters, e.g., the worker, the nurse, the children, or prominent dignitaries, the royal family, other heads of state, representatives of the media elite, her cabinet, but also of the Prime Minister doing everyday chores, such as the laundry, which is associated with personal life rather than the political. The samples below from her Facebook posts in October 2019, illustrates this well.



*Samples of Mette Frederiksen's photos in October 2019.*

The blend of sharing issue related updates with personal photos is interesting in more than one way.

First, sharing issues and personal photos is a clever way of mixing the two into a political and personal narrative. Sharing them together on social media platforms, like Facebook, invariably makes the personal photo the dominating part of the message. Cross posting between Instagram and Facebook, just adds to the dominating character of the personal photo.

Second, sharing issues and personal photos adds to the personalization of politics. The person in the images becomes the agent, who can take care of the issues presented. Obviously, Mette Frederiksen is not the only one, who has discovered this feature. Others have too, and the totality of the personalization speaks for an increased mediatization of politics.



*Danish television covering the election campaign in 2011.*

## 5.2 Breaking the Agenda

In the second case, *Breaking the Agenda*, I explore how of two different types of politicians, who have used video on social media to bypass the news media and aimed to set the political agenda in Denmark. In the first case, *The Prime Minister Live*, the central political figure is the mainstream elite politician, here represented by Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who as the Prime Minister used social media to bypass the news media, as a form of disintermediation, to set the political agenda. In the second case, *YouTube: Rasmus Paludan and the News*, the central figure is the right-wing populist candidate, Rasmus Paludan, who on the fringe of Danish politics with limited access to the news media, tried to circumvent the news media and set the political agenda. As such, the two cases represent different modes of communication on social media, which both have been part of a recurring research theme on the use of social media and politics. For the past decades, researchers have studied how politicians and parties have used social media platforms to communicate with voters and citizens, and in that process have bypassed the news media and to set the political agenda as well as the news media agenda. For the better part, previous research has approached this theme from a normative perspective, attributing value to the news media as the watchdog of democracy, also known as the fourth estate of government, and where social media have been understood to be a subsidiary part of the media system, rather than a distinctive form of communication by itself.

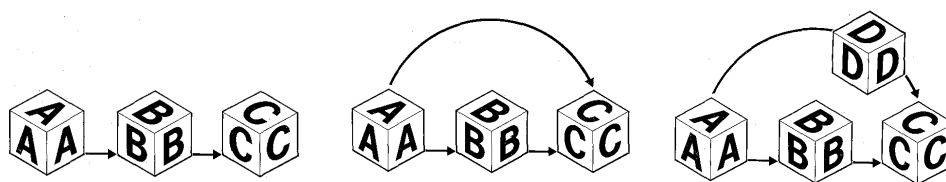
In this perspective, research of how political communication should be to qualify as legitimate news, rather than what politicians thought it is. Here the news media is viewed as the natural filter – or as in the role of the gatekeeper of the news stream through which communication must flow. Less attention has been paid to social media as a new form of communication with a distinct media logic of its own.

Before I turn to the two empirical cases, I address aspects of circumvention and disintermediation, previous Danish research, and briefly, video on social media.

### Circumvention and Disintermediation

There is a fine, but blurred line between the concepts of circumvention and disintermediation. Circumvention refers to bypassing intermediaries in the communication process, whereas disintermediation refers to removing any intermediaries in the communication process, or, in proverbial terms, cutting out the middleman. The concept of bypassing news reporting in the mass media is not new. Previously, when mass media dominated the political arena, politicians would try to bypass the media agenda on television or in newspapers, and often this would be done by advertising in the very same media. In building a conceptual model for communications research in the late 1950s, Westley and MacLean Jr. (1957) found that there were two ways to get around gatekeepers of mass media, either through direct personal experiences or through unmediated contact with societal sources.

Inspired by Hester's (1969) observations from trading in the financial markets in the late 1960s, where new technologies, i.e. computers, allowed traders to eliminate middlemen in transactions, thus saving transaction fees and increasing profits, Katz (1988) introduced a model of disintermediation into communication research (see the three A to C models below), suggesting that the sociology of mass communications had much to learn from technological theories. Katz argued that disintermediation could happen by A aiming at reaching C in order to pressure B, or in order to reach C, A could wish to supersede B. Using new technology to supersede B, Katz argued that "technological theories propose both that B is no less a medium than D, and D no less a basis of power and social organisation than B".



*Mediation and disintermediation according to Katz (Katz, 1988)*

Disintermediation, social media, and agenda-setting are closely related today. Social media platforms can operate as the source of information for news reporting in mass media or the platforms can be used to circumvent news reporting by political actors to communicate controversial political decisions, comment on media rituals and events, and frame the personal agendas of individual politicians.

Today, political actors still engage with the news media and they still seek to bypass news reporting in the mass media, but they do so while increasing the use of social media platforms for organic political communication as well as for advertising. In doing so, the consequences of disintermediation political actors moving business from one type of media to another form of media, and as such disintermediation adds another layer to the competing media logics.

Disintermediation is however not just about bypassing the news reporting in mass media. In revisiting the election in the United States in 2016, David Karpf (2017) observed that Donald Trump's "dominance of mainstream media seems deeply rooted in the emerging logics of the political information cycle", adding that Trump was rarely using Twitter "to bypass the mainstream media. Instead, he was using social media in order to set the agenda of the mainstream media". Obviously, timing is of great importance in political communication, but so too is the changed practices of journalism and news reporting in mass media. In coining the concept of *gatewatching* as the move away from editorial gatekeeping in news reporting, Axel Bruns (2005: 19) argued that the displacement of gatekeepers with gatewatchers demonstrated "that there still remains a need and a desire amongst its users to see news in context as they search for information". Bruns (2005: 307) noted, however, that "industrialized journalism is undergoing a significant process of change as it moves into a post-industrial, digital, user-driven era, its traditional modus operandi will no longer be able to provide a sufficient framework". To Bruns, journalism was not doomed because of digital media, since journalism is not a matter of technology, but it needed to be reinvented. Years later, Ralph Schroeder (2017: 166) noted the change from mass media to digital and social media, and argued that the displacement of mass media with direct communication on digital and social media is the result of long-term process of mediatization, which includes increased mediation. The internet, Schroeder maintains, extends mediatization in three main ways: traditional media are circumvented by digital media, people become more connected, audiences are targeted more, thus become "more engaged with tailored online content".

With the rise of digital and social media, the political elites have found alternate routes to influence the media agenda or to bypass mass media

altogether and reach the voters directly, at scale. In reality, however, this largely impacts the absolute elite among political, since access to the news media and the media agenda before social media was limited to the elite politicians, such as presidents, prime ministers, cabinet ministers, and party leaders, as well as major parties. To many less prominent political actors, who hardly ever made the news in the first place, bypassing and disintermediation of mass media may prove to be a chance to be seen and heard by the public and the news media. This is equally true for candidates standing in election for the first time. Getting onto the media agenda has always been near to impossible for new candidates, unless they were prominent in other circles, e.g., being a media celebrity outside politics, pulled some spectacular media stunt, or voiced extreme political ideas or dissented from the party line.

In considering social media to be part of a hybrid media system, political actors can now use platforms for online commentary of issues or events on the agendas, thus diffusing political messages and opinions through intermedia agenda-setting, thus influencing the media agenda. One common form of commentary is the dual or second screening of media events, on television and Twitter. Second screening and dual screening are two highly related concepts of the consumption media events and digital commentary, which are often performed on social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook. The terminology is frequently used as interchangeable concepts, but there are noticeable differences. Vaccari, Chadwick, and O’Loughlin (2017; 2015) define dual screening as a “set of social practices in which publics combine consumption and commentary during media events”, while de Zúñiga, Garcia-Perdomo, and McGregor (2015) define second screening as “a process in which individuals watching television use an additional electronic device or “screen” to access the Internet or social networking sites to obtain more information about the program or event they are watching or to discuss it in real time”. The definition of dual screening is more inclusive, since the commentary is directed at media events, whereas the second screening definition explicitly refers to television. In a study of *Twitter as a News Source* from 2007 to 2011, Broersma and Graham (2013) explored how journalists used Twitter for finding new stories, finding sources and information, collecting quotes, and, finally, for “verifying information by using the wisdom of the crowd”. The study showed differences in terms of media type and national practices among the four Dutch and four British national tabloids and broadsheets they investigated, but it also showed that the practises of journalists were changing. Among the findings was that, while tabloids favoured *soft* stories about celebrities, journalists were on the “watch for political tweets and other “hard” news issues that break on Twitter”. And second, although journalists were cautious when quoting from tweets, often

they would “simply copy statements from sources”, thus allowing sources to “gain control over their public discourse”.

### **Danish Research in Circumvention and Disintermediation**

In a Danish context, no separate research has been written about the politicians use of video on social media platforms, but disintermediation and circumvention in Danish politics have been studied by a few scholars. In 2013, Skovsgaard and Van Dalen (2013) found that politicians used social media bypass the news media, but the news media was still the most important communication channel for campaigning, primarily for candidates who were “newsworthy due to their experience and incumbency status”. These candidates used social media to “generate coverage in the traditional mass media”, while challengers were “more likely to use social media to compensate for lack of attention from the mainstream media”. Skovsgaard and Van Dalen concluded that social media were integrated into the “campaign mix according to the incentive structure of the electoral system and the media logic which characterizes modern campaigns”. Adding to this, they argued that the “characteristics of the Danish parliamentary election campaign ... should be taken into account when generalizing these findings to other countries and elections”, and that social media should be studied as a part of the “overall campaign mix, rather than in isolation”.

In 2016, Lena Kjeldsen (2016a, 2016b) explored disintermediation in her Ph.D. thesis. In *Bypassing the gatekeepers?*, Kjeldsen showed how the processes of dis- and reintermediation can extend our understanding of “the changing dynamics in political communication”, including hypermedia campaigning and the hybrid media system, have matured and become integral to the politicians communication strategies. In the article, *Between Power and Powerlessness*<sup>1</sup>, Kjeldsen explored how the politicians’ use of social media created a new source of information in political journalism, but also how it changed the relationship between journalists and politicians. Kjeldsen found that while the politicians gained more control over their message, they also lost control because of the platforms’ affordances of interactivity.

### **Video on Social Media**

In the past decades, video has increasingly become a major type of content on social media platforms, on platforms like YouTube and Facebook. Over the years, the changing logic, forms, formats, and affordances have changed how social media are used, and added new forms of social interaction to the platforms. Video based communication has expanded from pre-taped video clips to live streaming narrowcasts via smartphones, studio scale systems, and

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<sup>1</sup> My translation of the articles title, *Mellem Magt og Afmagt*.

even drones, adding authenticity to the political messages, the individual politician's competences, and situating politics in locative space. Videos are often referred to as virals, which as Limor Shifman (2013: 56) has observed comprises of a *single cultural unit* that propagates in many copies. Social media have made it possible for users to view video live or asynchronously, but they have also made it possible for the users to share video with other users on the same platform, across multiple platforms, and to embed video on external websites. For many users, including politicians and parties, one aim of using video has been to gain maximum diffusion and visibility. This form for sharing is often referred to as *virality*, which is characterised by three attributes, person to person mode of diffusion, great diffusion speed enhanced by social media platforms, and a broad reach across multiple platforms. Hemsley and Mason (2012) have defined virality as a word-of-mouth "diffusion process wherein a message is actively forwarded from person to person, within and between multiple weakly linked personal networks, and marked by a period of geometric growth in the number of people who are exposed to the message". This diffusion process is a foundational part of social media logic, or as Klinger and Svensson (2015: 1248) have observed, distribution "on social media platforms is built on the logic of virality".

As social media platforms have become parts of everyday politics, so too has video content. In 2007, YouTube was the main platform for sharing video online, but Facebook and other platforms followed soon after, making it possible to share video. In 2014, when *Facebook Live Stream* was made available for users who were eligible for *Facebook Mentions*, most live streams were performed with handheld devices, e.g., produced with mobile phones or compact cameras, and thus truly represented user generated content, but in the process, the use of professional productions increased too. Correspondingly, while many politicians have used streaming video in a casual manner, they have also mimicked how political media events have been ritualized and framed by broadcast media, and as such they have adopted mass media's formats, modes of appearances and rhetorical style, and often the ceremonial style of mass media in familiar settings housing institutional power, such as government offices or the parliament. As a result, this has led to different types of live stream narrowcasting with distinct formats and styles, serving different purposes and audiences, but the underlying media logic of live streams require scheduling streams and recurring posting routines, thus adding to the mediatization of politics.

Facebook and YouTube are still the main platforms for sharing video, but in the today, there new social media platforms in play, which can be used for sharing of video, such as Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok.





*Streaming Lars Løkke Rasmussen's New Year's speech 2017.*

### 5.2.1 The Prime Minister Live

Elitism is not a new phenomenon in Danish politics, but it is a matter with complications and many contradictions. The political establishment, here understood as the elected politicians and the government, is clearly in hierarchical positions with the power to influence people's lives. The hierarchy within the political establishment is well established and often visible. Politicians close to the government often exert the most political power, whereas backbenchers need to work harder to influence political matters and adhere to the party discipline. At the same time, many parties are small organizations, traditional people parties, with longstanding cultural traditions for open discussions in which is possible for party members to be heard. In many cases, this is not exclusive to party members. Citizens generally have relatively easy access to local politicians, parties, members of parliament and of government, also on social media platforms.

In the Danish Power Study from 2004, one finding was that the increased professionalization of the political parties increased the perceived distance between the leadership and the party members. As such, party members felt that this led to a concentration of political and organisational power among a professionalized party elite. On the other hand, the study also found that the gap between the political elite, i.e., the elected politicians, and the voters was narrow, and since the late 1990s it had been closing (Togeby, 2003, p. 110f).

Obviously, the political elite enjoy privileges that are outside the reach of ordinary citizens, including access to the news media. The better positioned a politician is with the political establishment, the better media access, and at

the pinnacle of representative political power in Denmark is the Prime Minister. Yet despite of this, in the past decade politicians have increasingly used social media platforms to engage in unmediated communication with citizens and voters, but they have also increasingly used digital and social media to bypass the news media. This development is not emblematic of just one politician or members of just one party but has been emerging as part of a general process, in which politicians and parties have sought autonomy of the news media. As such, the process has sometimes been accompanied with criticism of the news media.



*Henrik Sass Larsen with former television news anchor at the Danish Broadcasting Company, Reimer Bo Christensen, on YouTube, February 11, 2018.*

One example of the changing interplay and criticism of the news media was delivered by Henrik Sass Larsen, a co-chair in the Social Democratic Party, in an interview on YouTube in February 2018 (Christensen, 2018), produced by the party, and with a former television news anchor from the Danish Broadcasting Company, Reimer Bo Christensen, in the role as the interviewer. Here Sass Larsen criticised the news media for having abandoned reporting the views of the different political parties and having become preoccupied by commenting on the political game rather than with political substance, thus damaging the politicians' possibilities to present and discuss politics between each other and with the citizens as such. To Sass Larsen that was part of an argument for reinventing public party media, which could report from the political arena.

Others have simply changed their practices, because of the new and increased affordances on social media, such as Facebook, and the perceived changes in the political news reporting. One early example of the changed practises was supplied by Mette Abildgaard from the Conservative Party on May 20, 2016.

The party had joined the Liberal Party, the Liberal Alliance, and the Danish People's Party in an agreement on the nature, forests, and wildlife in Denmark. The agreement was about to be presented on live television by the minister, Esben Lunde Larsen, the Liberal Party, at a doorstep press conference at the Ministry of Environment and Food with the participation of the speakers from the parties. To alert her followers on Facebook of the new agreement and her appearance on live television, Abildgaard made a short announcement of the agreement on Facebook, walking to the doorstep (Abildgaard, 2016a).



*To the left, Mette Abildgaard announcing that she is on the way to a doorstep press conference presenting the new agreement. To the right, Abildgaard presents the Conservative Party's views live on Facebook.*

After the doorstep, where the speakers were only granted brief opportunities to comment on the agreement on live television, Mette Abildgaard turned to Facebook to present the Conservative Party's views and contributions to the agreement (Abildgaard, 2016b). While her comments on Facebook may not have reached a broader audience, it did reach her followers and was viewed almost 10,000 times.

This sort of social media use is increasingly being performed routinely by politicians, who wish to stay visible, and as such, it plays into a long and slow process of a changing media system, in which social media have increased politicians' autonomy of the news media. Consequently, circumvention and disintermediation have become part of the Danish political communication culture.

### The Facebook Prime Minister

One of the politicians who have actively used social media to disintermediate, or bypass, the news media is former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen. Løkke Rasmussen has often been presented and perceived as a jovial politician, who was aligned with ordinary people. For years, he was known as *little Lars from Græsted*<sup>2</sup> (Kragh, 2012). Græsted is a small town in northern Zealand, widely known as Lars Løkke Rasmussen home turf, where you could run into him at the local pub or at the local theatre (Barrington Rosendahl, 2019), and in 2017, La Cantina, the local pizzeria in his old hometown, Græsted, named a pizza *Lars Løkke*, another the *Prime Minister* (Jeppesen, 2017). But Græsted is also a closely knit local community with strong religious sentiment (Schou, 2009). His wife, Sólrún has been a member of Græsted-Gilleleje Municipal Council, just as Lars Løkke Rasmussen was. Here he came of age and lived until 2012, when the family moved to Copenhagen (Karker & Bech, 2012). In the news media, he has often been aligned with the common Dane. He often portrays himself walking the dogs, working on the shared home in Sweden, or relaxing family visits to the Faroe Islands. In frequent news reports, he has been portrayed as an ordinary person, who you would share a beer with (Ringberg, 2014; Ritzau, 2011).

It may sound more like traits of a local mayor, than an elite politician, but you should not be confused by the folksy glow surrounding Løkke Rasmussen.

In 1986, Lars Løkke Rasmussen became a candidate for The Liberal Party and a Member of Parliament since September 21, 1994. Løkke Rasmussen was active in local politics from 1986 to 2001. He was elected member of Græsted-Gilleleje Municipal Council from 1986 to 1997. He was County mayor of Frederiksborg County from 1998 to 2001. Lars Løkke Rasmussen has been an active member and national chairman of the Young Liberals from 1986 to 1989. He was a member of the central board of the Liberal Party twice. First from 1986 to 1990 and again from 1998 to 2019.

Løkke Rasmussen became the Liberal Party's vice-chairman in 1998 and chairman from 2009 to 2019. He served as a government minister in Anders Fogh Rasmussen's governments from 2001 to 2009, first as the Minister for the Interior and Health from 2001 to 2007, and as the Minister for Finance from 2007 to 2009. Løkke Rasmussen served as Prime Minister in Denmark twice. First from 2009 to 2011, when he replaced Anders Fogh Rasmussen as party leader and Prime Minister, and again after his election win in 2015 to 2019. During his second term as Prime Minister, he was leading a one party

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<sup>2</sup> My translation. The original is "lille Lars fra Græsted".

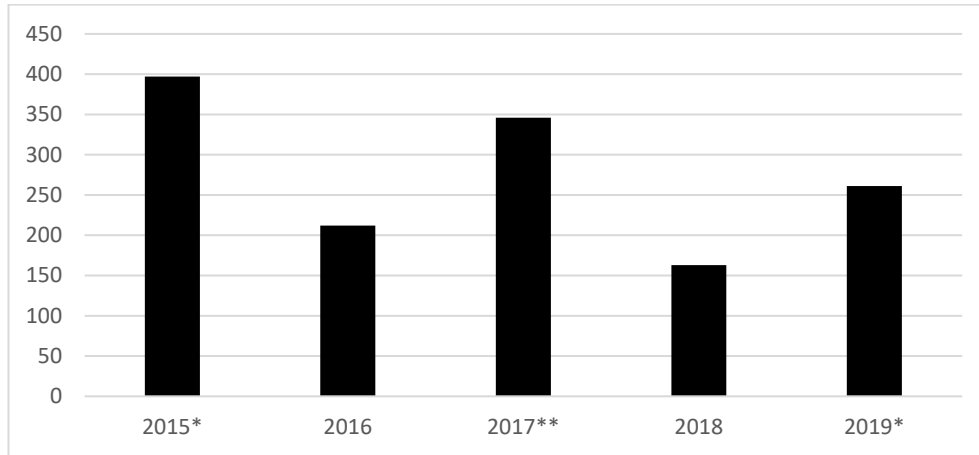
minority government from 2015 to 2016, with the support of the Conservative Party, the Liberal Alliance, and the Danish People's Party. From 2016 to 2019, he led a government headed by his own party, the Liberal Party, which included the Conservative Party and the Liberal Alliance, and with the support of the Danish People's Party. Lars Løkke Rasmussen holds a Master of Laws from the University of Copenhagen, 1992, and he worked as an independent consultant from 1990 to 1995. Løkke Rasmussen was the chairman of the South Korean based *Council of Global Green Growth Institute*, also known as 3GI, from 2012 to 2014. He founded *LøkkeFonden* in 2012 and served as chairman of the board from 2012 to 2015.

It would not be an overstatement to say that Lars Løkke Rasmussen has been a prominent part of the political establishment since 1986. But it would also be safe to say, that he often has been embroiled in political controversies and personal scandals. As a representative the Young Liberals, he travelled to war torn Afghanistan in 1988, visiting to schools his organisation had helped fund. Being there, he was photographed with the local mujahedeen while brandishing an AK47 Kalashnikov (Hyhne, 2016). A string of stories about misuse of public money, mismanagement of funds in 3GI (Frandsen, 2013; Justesen, 2014), and of party funds culminated in 2014, when it became public that the Liberal Party had spent 152.000 Danish Kroner on clothes for Løkke Rasmussen (Henriksen et al., 2014; Ritzau, 2017). The Liberal Party faced a severe internal crisis and a leadership contest, in which Løkke Rasmussen was challenged by the party's vice-chairman, Kristian Jensen (Skov, 2014). The leadership contest was resolved on an extraordinary party conference in June 2014, apparently with an agreement of a shared leadership in the party (Kildegaard et al., 2014; Skov Jakobsen, 2014). Eventually, after losing the general election to Mette Frederiksen (SDP), Lars Løkke Rasmussen resigned in 2019, but only after another dramatic challenge of his leadership of the party.

One of the reasons Lars Løkke Rasmussen has been able to stay among the absolute political elite for more than two decades, is his ability to set the agenda and control the narrative of a story. Løkke Rasmussen has often been at odds with the news media, and he has become renowned for his use of social media, mainly Facebook. Løkke Rasmussen, who created a Facebook page in 2009, has been highly active on the platform over the years, and he has also used social media as a means to circumvent the news media, which earned him the nickname, the 'Facebook Prime Minister' in the news media (Kildegaard, 2017) and among political opponents (Qvortrup, 2016).

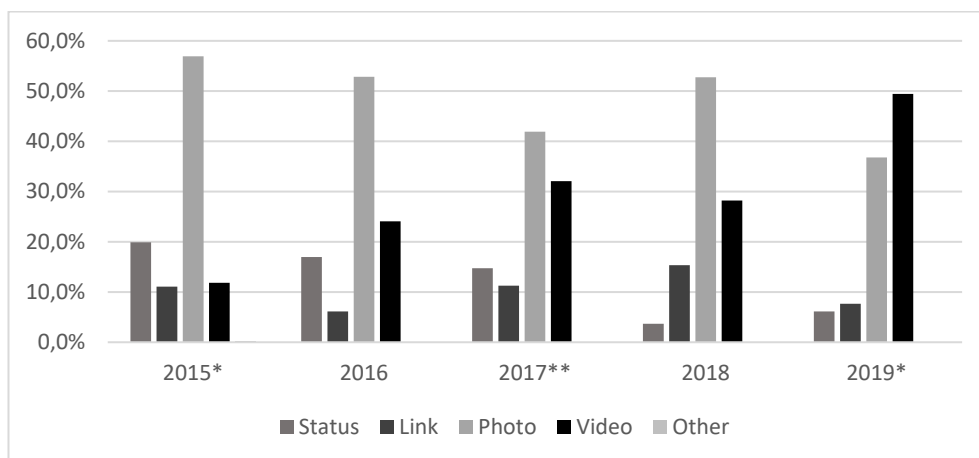
### The Empirical Case

Not surprisingly, Løkke Rasmussen was posting more frequently on Facebook in election years, than outside. His most active year was in 2015, when he and the Liberal Party won the general election, followed by a high level of posting activities for the local and regional elections in 2017. Remarkably, he was posting less in 2019, which included the election for the European Parliament and later the general election.



*Løkke Rasmussen's volume of Facebook posts from 2015 to 2019. Years marked with an asterisk were election years.*

One part of the explanation is that Løkke Rasmussen lost the general election and resigned as chairman of the Liberal Party. Another part of the explanation is that he changed the way he used Facebook. Like many other politicians, Løkke Rasmussen's preferred type of Facebook posts was the image format, but in the years 2015 to 2019, he increasingly used the video format, often as live streams, for posting on Facebook, and in 2019, the video format peaked as his preferred posting type.



*The different types of Facebook posts by Løkke Rasmussen from 2015 to 2019. Years marked with an asterisk were election years.*





*Screengrab from video posted on Facebook on June 4, 2019. Løkke Rasmussen is in the back of a military cargo plane with the bay door open, saluting the escorting fighter planes.*

Løkke Rasmussen’s increased use of videos on Facebook reveals a mixed repertoire of different formats and production forms, but it also tells of a politician, who is experienced in the use of social media. Some videos are clearly made by larger teams with multiple professional grade cameras and extensive editing. Among this category are campaign videos, videos from the party conferences, the Prime Minister meeting Trump, or Løkke Rasmussen engaged in activities in his personal foundation, e.g., with people biking together with. Others are made with handheld devices, such as the smartphone, or laptops. Among these are reports from the campaign trail, live commenting after televised debates, or question and answer sessions, in which Løkke Rasmussen replies to questions sent to him or posted in the comment area on Facebook. Some videos are made for recurring events, such as his weekly *Sunday Thoughts*, or cultural events, such as his yearly Christmas calendar.





*Screengrabs from different videos posted on Løkke Rasmussen's page on Facebook.*

Some videos are of a more closeup and personal in nature, in which the Prime Minister meet and greet in the street, in the official home of the Prime Minister, or on his holiday trips to the Faroe Islands. And then, some videos are clearly intended to be funny, such as a short video of a marshmallow being dipped into a chocolate fountain, posted on January 25, 2017, which was viewed more than 100 thousand times on Facebook.

The extensive use of video is not only a steady stream of communication political messages, but also just as much a way for Løkke Rasmussen to provide a personal image of the politician to the users on Facebook. At the same time the volume of the videos shows that Løkke Rasmussen has explored and used video on social media routinely, as a part of his strategic communication, as a form of direct and unmediated communication to his followers, the voters, and citizens.



*The Prime Minister's New Years' Speech, January 1, 2016*

One format that Løkke Rasmussen has cultivated over the years, is that of the statesman delivering important political speeches to the people, framed in the institutional settings of the Prime Minister. As such, the format originates from the official New Years' speeches broadcast on January first every year,



either from Marienborg, the official residence of the Prime Minister, or from the Prime Minister's office at Christiansborg.

Løkke Rasmussen found ways to use the video format for other purposes. On January 2, 2016, Løkke Rasmussen posted a video produced to accompany his New Years' speech the previous day, in which he was talking about conversations among citizens and discussions in civil society. In the video from January 2, Løkke Rasmussen is seen delivering his New Years' speech, but then turns his head away from the main camera, and into another camera, which was not part of the original production. The move marks an excursion from the original speech, but to a related topic, the uncivilized tone of the debates on social media, with ample examples from his own Facebook page.



*The Prime Minister's Excursion, January 2, 2016*

Løkke Rasmussen's excursion from an institutionalized format is an efficient and powerful way to set the agenda since the issue is loaded with all the weight of the premiership and the well-established format known from broadcast television. The excursion added to the slow process of a changing media system, but it was also a precursor of things to come.

### **The Prime Minister Live**

On August 29, 2016, Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen went live on Facebook. Framed in the familiar institutional setting known from the Prime Minister's New Years' speeches, Løkke Rasmussen was presenting his government's plans for Danish economy towards 2025. What was remarkable about the presentation, apart from the format and the live streaming on Facebook, was the absence of political journalists and the news media.



*Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen on Facebook, August 29, 2016.*

Although the government had scheduled a press conference the next day, it was the first time, that a government had presented a major political plan without the participation of the news media.

Not surprisingly, the news media were raging about the Prime Minister's live stream in articles, commentaries, and of course on social media. Editors criticized the Prime Minister for his display of a one way communication and his lack of willingness to answer questions from the media (to the right: Poul Madsen, editor of the tabloid newspaper Ekstra Bladet, attacks Løkke Rasmussen on Twitter).

In the following days, the news media were more interested in the Prime Minister's disintermediation of the news media than of the government's economic plan, but in reality, the news media could not do much more than accept that the Lars Løkke Rasmussen had used social media to invoke a new order in the Danish media system. Although shifting governments and leading politicians still meet the press for interviews, the presentations of government policies, party plans, and politicians' proposals for legislation are increasingly moving to social media platforms, thus showing a submission to the social media logic and the intensified mediatization of politics.





*Illustration 1: Screenshot from YouTube: Paludan in Elsinore, 2019.*

### 5.2.2 Rasmus Paludan and the News

Circumvention and disintermediation are not reserved for established politicians and parties. In the general election in 2019, the old radical right-wing party, the Danish Peoples' Party experienced dramatic collapse in voter support. The party lost voters to the left, mainly to the Social Democratic Party, which had embraced the far right positions on immigrants and refugees, if not in policies, then at least in discourse. And it lost voters to the right, where two new radical right-wing parties were challenging its position on the far-right and fragmentating the far-right leaning voters.

The general election was a major breakthrough for the radical right-wing party Hard Line and its leader Rasmus Paludan. Hard Line, a radical right-wing party with a populist ideological foundation and few political issues, e.g., the deportation of non-Ethnic Danes, a reduced state apparatus, and the rejection of the political establishment and the media elites, which had politicized news production to secure elite hegemony, repression of the will and happiness of the Danish people, and the exclusion from mass media of the true voices of resistance. Rasmus Paludan was convicted of racism in April 2019 (Bollerslev, 2019). The decision was upheld in July 2019 (Walentin Mortensen & Søndberg, 2019).

In 2017, the party had surfaced for the local elections. The party had eight candidates standing in six municipalities and results came in, those eight candidates shared a total of 136 personal votes and the party could tally a combined total of 286 votes in the six municipalities. The party failed completely. On election day in 2019, less than two years later, the party was 7.520 votes short of passing the electoral threshold of two percent. And

although the party did not win the minimum four seats in parliament, it had cleared the endorsements process in a record time, the party was represented in all ten multimember constituencies, it had twenty-five candidates standing in the general election, and the party and Rasmus Paludan had become household names in Danish politics.

On election day, June 6, 2019, the party nearly passed the electoral threshold of two percent. The party only got 1,79 percent of the votes, but even if the party was not successful at the polling stations, it succeeded in setting the agenda on social media platforms and in the news media. During the short campaign, the party leader Rasmus Paludan outperformed most of the other party leaders from the established parties in terms of media coverage. Apart from the incumbent prime minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP) and the challenger from the centre left-wing coalition, Mette Frederiksen (SDP), Rasmus Paludan received most coverage among the party leaders in the news media during the election campaign.

This case is a process composed of two markedly different stages. The first stage is an exploration of how a radical right-wing populist party, with limited access to the news media, use social media platforms to get enough voter endorsements and become eligible to stand for election. The second stage is on how the populist party uses social media platforms during the election campaign with the objectives to set the media agenda and get the attention of the voters. The case is then a matter of how the party leader, Rasmus Paludan's performative use of social media platforms, mainly YouTube, the party's use of social media platforms to bypass and engage traditional news media, the party's rise during the short election campaign, and its influence on the media agenda, which all in combination makes for an interesting case of different forms of media logic, e.g., social media logic, network media logic, and the logic of a hybrid media system. as well as agenda setting.

### **The Case and the Questions**

In recent years, populism has been on the rise with radical right-wing parties, like Hard Line, challenging elite politics and institutional power. However, while radical right-wing populist “explicitly claim to be true democrats, setting out to reclaim power for the people”, they are often regarded as a threat to democracy (Bang & Marsh, 2018; Canovan, 2004). So to keep radical right-wing parties and populists from political influence in countries around Europe, as Downs (2002) has observed, the general strategies of mainstream parties have been to either ignore populists to deprive them of any sense of legitimacy or importance, or to isolate them within the political arena, a strategy which is commonly known as a *cordon sanitaire*. The strategy of isolating right-wing populists has been expressed manifestly in countries like

Belgium, where parties have agreed not to cooperate with the Flemish party *Vlaams Belang* (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), in Sweden, where the parties refuse to include the *Sweden Democrats* in the political process (Heinze, 2018; Schroeder, 2017), and in Germany, where there is a long-standing tradition of excluding extremist parties, like the *Republicans* or *Alternative für Deutschland* (Arzheimer, 2015; Müller & Schwarz, 2017). The populist radical right-wing parties object to the disenfranchisement of political minorities and they reject the existing power game, in which the political elites determine who gets to decide what the truth is, what the facts are, and which solutions are most suitable to solve the problems of present-day society. The rise of populism is often referred to as *post-truth politics*, or politics in post-truth society (D’Ancona, 2017; Fuller, 2018), since it is associated with the combined use of social media platforms and alternative forms of news media.

### Defining Populism

Obviously, populism is not a new phenomenon, but in recent decades, the study of populism and its rise in political parties and social movements has intensified. Populism is neither a phenomenon found exclusively among radical right-wing parties and movements. In Denmark the prototypical case for a populist right-wing party is the *Danish Peoples’ Party* (Rydgren, 2004, 2017), but recently, research has explored the new Danish party, the *Alternative*, as a case of a centre-left populist party (Husted & Hansen, 2017).

While there seem to be agreement that the basic configuration of populism deals with the relationship between *the people* and *the elite*, populism is a widely contested term. Bossetta and Husted (2017) have identified four major research approaches to populism, which includes the study of populism as an ideology, e.g. Mudde (below) or Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), populism as a rhetorical style, e.g. Moffitt’s studies of antipodean populism (Moffitt, 2017) or Moffitt and Tormey’s studies of mediatisation and political style (2014), populism as a movement, and populism as a logic, e.g. Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014; Mouffe, 2018), but also as a discursive term (Laclau, 2005).

Populism, as an ideology, is often found in extremist political forms and performed among radical right-wing parties. In those cases, the parties’ extreme politics seem to qualify other (less) populist parties’ positions, to use the words of Cas Mudde, closer to the mainstream populist *Zeitgeist*. To Cas Mudde, populism is not defined by an organizational form or a special style of communication, but, as Mudde (2017) argues, the populist radical right shares a core ideology that combines nativism, often as a combination of nationalism and xenophobia, and authoritarianism, which is the belief in a

strictly ordered society, with populism. Populism is often defined as the *voice of the people*, or as an opportunistic approach to policies, which are meant to please for quick popular gains. In a previous work, Mudde (2004: 543. Emphasis in original) defined thin populism as

an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté Générale* (general will) of the people.

Cas Mudde’s definition is the most pervasive within studies of populism, but it needs more dimensions to include the radical right-wing parties’ politics and their communication strategies.

### **Media Populism**

Much like any other form political communication, populists are dependent on visibility in mass media and on presence on social media platforms. As long as they do not collide with the terms of services or the community standards of the social media platforms, platforms, like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, enable populists to bypass the gatekeepers, i.e., the media elite, of traditional mass media and propagate their ideologies, and afford them to perform the central populist narratives live or on-demand, while closing the gap between offline and online social and collective action. On social media platforms, mediated online interaction, stretched out in space and time, communication between multiple connections makes it possible for populists to routinely engage and mobilise supporters, organize events and coordinate participation, produce and share memetic content on platforms, across networked media, and exert influence on broadcast mass media in the hybrid media system.

In recent years, social media platforms have added new dimensions to the mediatization of politics, often in the form of increased personalization and the staging of politics events as media events, thus intensifying the media pressure in mediatized society. According to Mazzoleni (2014: 44) “new media are joining the “old” media and radicalizing the mediatization of politics and political communication”. Mazzoleni argues that “media populism” found in mass media forms the nexus of influences between this logic and political populism. The close connection between media populism and the popular content spread by the media industry, then supports the idea that the medias “own brand of populism can provide a platform, intentionally or un intentionally, that is conducive of political populism” (2014: 48). As for social media, Mazzoleni argues that they play a special role in sharing media populism, since the populist output of mass media is relaunched into “a wider

context of the electronic public sphere, thus generating a favourable climate of opinion”. Mazzoleni’s conclusion is that “media populism is the engine a political populism” in the “thin conceptualisation of the political communication style of political actors that refers to the people” (2014: 53). Mazzoleni points to a study by Jagers and Walgrave (2007), in which they addressed populism as political communication style among the political parties in Belgium, and along with that, they discussed and explored the reasoning behind the *cordon sanitaire* created for Vlaams Blok, later Vlaams Belang, in Belgian politics. Moffitt and Tormey (2014) have a similar approach to populism. In their paper on populism, mediatization and political style, they focus on the “performative dimension of populism within the context of the heavily mediatised and ‘stylised’ milieu of contemporary politics”. As such they argue that the political landscape is “intensely mediatised and ‘stylised’”, and therefore “one does not need to subscribe to a distinct political theoretical framework to utilise the concept of ‘political style’”. In Kriesi’s (2014) exploration of mediatization and populism, he notes that the increased autonomy of the media has contributed to an erosion of the functions of the established parties, and as a consequence, politicians and parties adapt to “the imperatives of the ‘media logic’”, and politicians devote more attention to the “‘self-mediatization of politics’” (Kriesi adopted the term from Frank Esser). It is not just the politicians’ practises that change. Journalists’ practices change too, because an increasingly “professionalised and commercialised media system”. Here Kriesi argues that journalists “mainly tend to focus on the political contest at the detriment of the policies’ substantive content”. Reporting on the political contest includes negative reporting, horse-race journalism with focus on strategies, personalities, and campaign tactics, conflict and drama, infotainment, and interventionist reporting.

Following Paolo Gerbaudo (2018), populism take on different forms according to the political orientation of a given populist party or movement. Within radical right-wing parties and movements, populism “tends to take highly exclusionary and xenophobic forms, whereby the people is constructed in opposition to the Other, and in particular migrants and ethnic and religious minorities”. Within left-wing populist parties and movements, Gerbaudo notes that “the unity of the People is constructed via the opposition against immoral privilege, as embodied by greedy bankers, rogue entrepreneurs and corrupt politicians accused of exploiting the people”. To understand the depth of right-wing populism, I think Ralph Schroeder (2017) is correct, when he argues that “one step must be to acknowledge that populist ideas are for the most part the expression of genuine discontent – not the irrational emotions



of people who have been misled”, and, Schroeder adds, “any explanation of populism must focus on politics”.

Previous research has shown, that to overcome the exclusion from politics, populist actors use social media platforms, since they enable them to bypass media gatekeepers and transmit direct messages to target audiences. In a study of how populist politicians spread a fragmented ideology, Engesser, Ernst, Esser, and Büchel (2017) argued that while “all media establish a connection to the people, social media provide the populists with a much more direct linkage”. But while it is true, that circumventing editorialized media may be a more direct route to the voters, it is always hard for political minorities to get access to the news media. The further away a minority party is from power, the more difficult it is to get the attention of the news reporting in broadcast mass media. Among radical right-wing parties, the exclusion strategies, e.g., political isolation and the enforcement of the cordon sanitaire, add to the populists’ perceptions of disenfranchisement by the political elites, including the left-wing media elites. Thus, access to mass media is an expression of political power, which is reserved for the political elite. Elite power is manifestly expressed in the ability to exert influence over the news media agenda and public opinion. To overcome this condition and reach mainstream voters, radical right-wing parties must not only submit to social media logic, but they must also submit to the logic of broadcast mass media.

I think that Ralph Schroeder (2017) understands this proposition of a double media logic correctly, when he argues that digital media is “a necessary precondition for the success” of populists, since populist messages are considered unsuitable for mainstream media, to a varying degree depending in context on the media system, it can only “be expressed online”. Nevertheless, as Schroeder asserts, “neither new media technology nor the rise and strengthening of populism alone explain the change in the political landscape; combined, they do”. Adding to the thickness of populism and media logics, Paolo Gerbaudo offers a similar view which also includes a political dimension to the new forms of populism. According to Gerbaudo, contemporary populist movements are marked by a deep economic crisis, but also by “rapid and highly disruptive technological innovation, which is redefining the way in which people communicate and work” (Gerbaudo, 2018).

### **Populism in Denmark**

Populist parties are not new in Danish politics, nor are the exclusion of right-wing populist from politics. In the general election in 1973, commonly referred to as the *landslide election*, two new populist parties, the *Centre Democrats*, which represented a splinter fraction from the Social Democratic



Party, and the *Progress Party*, which was a protest party, whose members had no or little political experience, emerged. While their political platforms were distinctly different, they shared a common populist approach to politics, which rejected elitism and claimed to represent the true voice of the Danish population. In the early 1970s, the parties were mostly pre-occupied with cultural elitism and leftism in government institutions, like the Danish Broadcasting Corporation or Danish museums, but even though both parties increasingly vocalized criticism of the largescale arrival of foreign labourers to Denmark and claimed concern for the impact on Danish society and culture, they did not reject foreigners because of their ethnicity, at least not explicitly as a matter of policy. In the latter part of the 1970s, that changed when the Progress Party increasingly assumed more radical positions against Muslims, and finally, the party adopted a policy for ‘Mohammedan-free Denmark’ in the early 1980s (Rydgren, 2004: 480). The Progress Party eventually collapsed. The founder, Mogens Glistrup, was convicted of tax evasion and jailed, and the party was left in internal turmoil, with factions fighting over policy and political strategy. In 1995, members of the party, who were tired of not being able to influence Danish politics and legislation, split and founded the Danish People’s Party. While the new party toned down policies critical of immigrants and refugees, it still embraced a populist discursive style and an anti-establishment stance.

To some, that was far from enough. The Danish People’s Party (DPP) had to be excluded from political influence altogether. In 1999, prime minister, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen fiercely objected to the Danish People’s Party’s policies towards refugees and immigrants, which he found to be intolerant and dehumanizing. In a speech in parliament, he likened the right-wing party to untrained house pets with the words: “No matter how hard you try – in my opinion – you will never become housebroken!” (Nyrup Rasmussen, 1999)<sup>3</sup>.

The Social Democratic Party lost the election in 2001, and as Rydgren (2004) has observed, DPP continued to minimize its anti-establishment strategy, when it became the “unofficial coalition partner” to the centre-right government, which sought to engage the party. Today, the party claim to represent the ordinary, working (class) Danes and its anti-establishment and anti-immigration rhetoric, sometimes described as *welfare chauvinism* (Rydgren, 2004: 486), as mainly been directed against the elitism prevalent in the Social Democratic Party, which used to be the working-class party. Adding to the differences, as observed by Rydgren, the Danish People’s Party has been “anxious to keep anti-democratic and overtly (biological) racist

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<sup>3</sup> My translation. The original quote from Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen reads “Uanset, hvor mange anstrengelser, man gør sig - set med mine øjne - stuerene, det bliver I aldrig!”.

groups and organisations at a distance”. This has, however, not stopped the DPP from having a hard line policies towards refugees and immigrants, policies which has been part of the political bargaining since the early 2000s. Increasingly, governments lead by the Liberal Party have traded parliamentary support for the government from DPP for influence on the governments’ policies on refugees and immigrants, to such a degree that the parties in government have adopted many of the legislative agreements as hard line policies of their own. This is not to say, that the adoption of hard-line policies are just expressions of changing strategies. Following the refugee and migrant crisis in 2015, it became clear that many European governments were confronted with large-scale groups of people, who were trying to enter the Europe Union and settle in northern Europe. The governments had to handle the crisis and in many countries the response was increased limitations for refugees and migrants.

In recent years, seeing that these hard-line policies enjoyed wide support among the Danish voters, particularly those leaning right, the Social Democratic Party have adopted many of the hard-line policies too. Some critics lament this change of policy, while others say that the Social Democratic Party, under the new leadership of Mette Frederiksen, has done so only for strategic reasons, trying to win back former social-democratic voters supporting the hard-line policies from right-wing parties, like the Danish Peoples’ Party. Whichever the case, in recent years a broad majority among voters and among members of parliament have supported these policies. For parties, like the Danish Peoples’ Party, trying to influence and secure these hard-line policies in the legislation, has meant they had to abandon some of the more extreme position or radical solutions. This has, in turn, paved the way for new radical right-wing parties, like the New Right and the Hard Line. While these parties share the opinion, that the older and more established right-wing parties have failed, their approaches to politics are markedly different. The New Right, which is founded by people with political experience<sup>4</sup>, seek to exert maximum pressure in the legislative work and, like traditional parties, they have developed a programme, which covers a wide range of political topics. In contrast, Hard Line is basically based on two political ideological concepts, right-wing identity politics and libertarian politics, which are presented as related political principles. As for identity politics, the party aims to make Denmark a homogenic society in terms of ethnicity, cultural and religious affinity, as well as a lingual community. Thus, the long-term goal is not only to limit foreigners’ access to Denmark, but to

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<sup>4</sup> The party leader of the New Right is, like other prominent members of the party, a former active and vocal member of the Conservative Party. The New Right subscribe to national conservatism, rather than more radical forms of ideologies found in right-wing parties.

have them leave the country all together. The party's libertarian politics is defined by the party's desire for a small state apparatus with minimal means and limited possibilities to interfere with citizens lives. The party describes its political philosophy as ethno-nationalistic utilitarianism with the aim to achieve the "most possible happiness for most ethnic Danes" (Stram Kurs, n.d.-a). The party is highly critical of the political establishment in Denmark (24NYT, 2019) and the European Union, which the party characterizes as a "non-democratic empire that defies the will of the Danish people to preserve Denmark" (Stram Kurs, n.d.-b)<sup>5</sup>.

Compared to the other nationalist radical right-wing parties, the party shares its ideology of ethno-nationalism with parties like *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany<sup>6</sup>, but in a Danish context, the party represents a marginal, extreme right-wing position, distinctly different from that of other Danish right-wing parties. In terms of party organisation, Hard Line seems to be a loosely assembled network of individuals, but with a tight party discipline among its candidates, which is enforced by the party leadership.

A central trope, which is closely related to the party's right-wing identity politics, is resistance to anyone trying to prevent ethnic Danes from achieving the most possible happiness. In a recent study by Leser, Spissinger, Homayer, and Neidel (2019) it is suggested that resistance is a master narrative among populists, since resistance "provides a frame for social and political (and sometimes, violent) action, while simultaneously legitimizing these actions". To Hard Line, resistance is important for safeguarding ethnic national norms and values, which are constantly challenged by a violent religion, i.e. Islam. Following an incident in Odense, in January 2019 Paludan wrote on Facebook (Paludan, 2019):<sup>7</sup>

A specific religion and culture attaches great importance to demeaning and humiliating their enemies. This applies, for example, to Danes who are considered enemies. This was seen in Odense, for example, where a 15-year-old boy was

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<sup>5</sup> My translation, "The EU is a non-democratic empire that defies the will of the Danish people to preserve Denmark", of the Danish text "EUs demokratiløse imperium, som tilsidesætter det danske folks demokratiske ønske om at bevare Danmark", found on the party's website.

<sup>6</sup> On January 5, 2019, following a bombing of a local branch office of AfD in Döbeln, in Saxony, Germany, Hard Line shared a link to the news story on a Swedish page (Redaktionen, 2019), Svegot, with the following post on their Facebook page (Stram Kurs, 2019b): "Our friends in the AfD in Germany have been the target of a despicable terrorist attack. The Europeans' enemies shun no means."

<sup>7</sup> My translation. The text in the original post is: "En specifik religion og kultur lægger utroligt meget vægt på at fornædte og ydmyge fjender. Det gælder fx danskere, som betragtes som fjender. Det så man fx i Odense, hvor en 15-årig dreng foran 20 jævnaldrende blev slået og sparket; men det var ikke voldende, der var det afgørende: han blev truet til at tage sine bukser og underbukser ned, og gå væk derfra, mens alle kunne se hans røv og pik. Det er det afgørende for de religiøse: at ydmyge danskere, så danskerne får ar på sjælen og ikke længere kan gøre modstand".

beaten and kicked in front of 20 of his peers; but it was not the violence that was crucial: he was threatened to take off his trousers and underpants and walk away while everyone could see his ass and cock. That is what is crucial for the religious: to humiliate Danes so that the Danes get scars on the soul and are no longer able to resist.

In this trope, the discursive construction of the other, i.e. the violent religious Muslim, is important for the actions of the populist leader, who needs to challenge this other at his own peril. For Paludan and Hard Line to show what an adversarial enemy the ethnic Danes face, resistance is performed and often staged as spectacular events in areas where tensions between ethnic groups are high and physical response is likely. As Paludan performs resistance, he endures hardship and violence. Adding to this, Paludan face the mockery of the elitists brute force, the police. Often his rights are limited or refused him. He is, he argues, denied his freedom of speech, as he is denied his constitutional right to demonstrate.

Similarly, when the true people is confronted by repressive elitist ‘truths’ in the media, e.g. the solutions proposed to fix social problems which only seem to be at the expense of the people, the populist leader is bound to object to the truths, oppose the discursive hegemony of the elite, and as a consequence, speak truth to elitist power. As noted by Silvio Waisbord (2018), the root of populism is not as a rejection of truth, but a reflection of the populists binary vision of politics. For the populist it is evident that “‘the people’ and ‘the elites’ hold their own version of truth. All truths are necessarily partial and anchored social interests. Truth does not exist as collective, common goal”. In similar vein, Waisbord notes that for populists, facts “are not neutral, but they are political owned and produced”.

### **Research Questions for the Populist Case**

Based on the hypothesis, that because of its extreme policies, it is difficult for the radical right-wing parties to get access to mainstream news media, the research questions which has informed the research into the first stage of Hard Lines social media use: first, how did Rasmus Paludan and the radical right-wing party Hard Line use social media platforms to mobilize citizens to secure sufficient endorsements for the party to stand for the general election in 2019? And secondly, to what extent did Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line use social media platforms to set the agenda in the news media during this period? For the second part of the case study, the research questions are: first, how did Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line succeed to mobilize citizens to vote for the party in the general election in 2019? And secondly, to what extent could Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line continue to use social media platforms

to exert influence, if any, on the media agenda? This two-stage study will inform us how radical right-wing parties use social media for the purpose of circumventing the media agendas, but also for intermedia agenda-setting, and as such, it teaches us about the workings of mediatization and hybrid politics, in the extreme: when politicians have to rely predominantly on social media to break through to both the public and the media.

### **The Methods**

This case study is illustrative of some of the challenges that meets the researcher, even within a short time span, when collecting and analysing data from social media platforms. The first challenge relates to how and when new parties are approved for standing in upcoming elections. In the general election in 2019, voters could cast their vote on anyone of the thirteen parties standing for the election. Four of these parties did not have a seat in parliament before the general election, three of them were new parties, approved within the last 18 months ahead of the election.

### **Data Collection**

On May 6, 2019, just one day before the election was called, Hard Line announced that it had been approved for standing in the election. A month earlier, on April 6, the party had secured less than a third of the endorsements needed for approval, it only had presented one possible candidate, the party leader Rasmus Paludan, and so, it seemed unlikely that the party would be ready for the election. Since that was the case, the party was not added to my ongoing data collection from social media platforms until the very last days of the long election campaign. Candidates were added to the data collection when they were presented during the short election campaign. The second challenge was that Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line used YouTube, rather than Facebook and Twitter, as the primary social media platform. During the short campaign 2019, I used a server-side script to access Facebook's API to collect data from candidates and parties who were using pages on the platform. The collected data was then stored in MySQL-server. For data collection from Twitter, I used the Digital Methods Initiative's Twitter Capture and Analysis Toolset, DMI-TCAT, developed at the University of Amsterdam (Borra & Rieder, 2014). To verify and supplement the data collection from Facebook and Twitter, I have used the online service Fanpage Karma (Uphill, 2018).

For this specific case, the underlying data set consists of 178 posts on Rasmus Paludan's Facebook page from January 5 to June 6, 2019. In addition, I also use a data set with 394 posts from the party's Facebook page from January 5 to June 6, 2019. Since the channel was removed from YouTube, it is no longer possible to view the videos on YouTube. I have retrieved a small sample, from which some will be included in the appendix (Appendix 7.4.1:

Supplementary Video Material – Hard Line 2019). The party did post some of them on Facebook, either as cross posts made simultaneously with the live transmissions on YouTube or as posts after the recording. For data collection on YouTube, I used the Digital Methods Initiative’s YouTube Data Tools (Borra, 2015; Rieder, 2015) to collect data during and after the election campaign. Hard Line’s YouTube channel was closed in February 2020 (Ritzau, 2020). This data collection covers the time from January 1 to June 6, 2019. For the party’s collection of endorsements for standing in the general election in 2019, I have used a dataset retrieved from the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior, which was made public in 2019 (See Appendix 7.4). To document the news coverage of the Hard Line campaign, I have used the Danish news media database, Infomedia, which I queried for search terms like ‘Rasmus Paludan’ and ‘Stram Kurs’.

### **Content Analysis**

For the initial content analysis for the case study, I used data collected from the party’s website, i.e., the party manifesto outlining the party’s programme and ideological foundation, to get a conceptual grasp of the party’s policies.

For analysis of the posts from Rasmus Paludan’s Facebook page, Hard Line’s Facebook page and the posts on the party’s channel on YouTube (see the appendix: Social media posts of Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line), I have adopted three different methods to explore the content, which include 1) content analysis of political participation, 2) an exploration of the different dimensions of populism presented by Hard Line and Paludan, and finally, 3) an analysis of a resistance narrative found in the posts. These methods are described further in what follows.

### **Populism and Political Participation**

For the first part of the content analysis, I was inspired by the typology of the processes of political participation suggested by Dutceac Segesten and Bossetta (2017), which they “designed to isolate mobilizing calls for action from the rest of the political discussion online”. Since I assume that the precondition for the success of populist communication relies on the strategic use of social media, it is useful to explore how and to what extent the content drives mobilization. In that process, other types of content become identifiable as well. I adopted this typology, mainly because of its simple and conceptual clarity, but also for its versatility in content analysis. In their typology, Dutceac Segesten and Bossetta organize content in a matrix, in which content is divided into four types, i.e., information (original content without a call for action), diffusion (shared content without a call for action), promotion (shared content containing a call for action), and instruction

(original content containing a call for action). These content types are then organized in a matrix, in which the vertical dimension is for content sharing and the horizontal dimension is for mobilizing content (See the figure to the right). The content typology can be applied to the political actor's posts in terms of volume, thus exploring which forms of political participation the political actor is aiming for, i.e., sharing or mobilizing, but it can also be applied to examine content types posted in a given time frame.

### Exploring Populism

The second type of content analysis, I use for this case, is inspired by the work of Jagers and Walgrave's (2007). It is very instructive, since the radical right-wing populism of the Vlaams Belang resemble that of Hard Line, just at a much larger scale. While I do not think it is possible to reduce populism to a just a rhetorical style or discourse, since the consequences are manifested in real politics, which impacts people, I subscribe to the analytical methods used by Jagers and Walgrave. In their study, they analysed content from Belgian television, measuring populism as a part of the total content broadcast. Here they divided the content into an index of thin populism, i.e., the mention of *the people*, an index of the anti-establishment sentiments, constructed by minor indexes, an anti-state index, an anti-politics index, and an anti-media index, expressed by the parties, and finally, to an index of exclusion. The three scores of the different indexes used to create an output, which captures the relationship between them and populism.

In my case, I used the posts from social media platforms, i.e., from Facebook and YouTube, rather than excerpts from television. In practical terms, I used the software AntConc (Anthony, 2019) to explore the corpus of the entire number of posts from Hard Line's Facebook page, the posts from Rasmus Paludan's Facebook posts, and the Hard Line's post on the party's YouTube channel. By using AntConc for re-organising the text into a list of single words, filtering the list by excluding common, but non-political words, e.g., *and, in, I, they, etc.*, and then arranging them according to their frequency, I eventually had a list of words which could be used to reference the party's policies. This list was then divided into three coding schemes (see the appendix: Coding Schemes for Populists) intended to capture the sentiments from the three indexes, a people index, and anti-establishment-index, and an exclusivity index. The people index included words like *the people* and *citizens*. The anti-establishment-index was divided further into three dimensions: an anti-state index, which contained words representing state authorities, an anti-political index, which included other politicians and parties, and an anti-media index, which included words referencing journalists, media outlets, and media events. Finally, the exclusivity index

contained words referencing immigrants, refugees, and people who were mentioned because of their religion, i.e. Muslims. For each index, posts, that contained words from the lists, were evaluated in terms of their positive (1), neutral (0), or negative messages (-1), and subsequently, the values were added to create a score for each index.

### **The Performance of Populist Resistance**

In the study by Leser, Spissinger, Homayer, and Neidel (2019), which is based on qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, they argue that an ethnographic perspective on the affective and narrative practises is analytical beneficial for understanding the “normalisation of the far right discourse within and across the political mainstream”. Leser et. al observed that social and collective action is legitimised when framed and performed as acts of the resistance narrative. The narrative is sometimes referred to as *the great replacement* (Davey & Ebner, 2019), and the basic story is that the nation, e.g. a homogeneous ethnic people or cultural entity, is under threat by a Muslim invasion, which eventually will lead to the replacement the original people. Those responsible are the elites, e.g. politicians, journalists, or liberals, *who know what is going on, but they are lying to the people about it*. To enable and mobilise supporters in the streets or on social media platforms, the resistance narrative requires a constant “enactment of courage, pride, solidarity, and a sworn community” who act in accordance with the far right-wings populists’ identities. In more than one sense, all public appearances and demonstrations held by Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line can be regarded as acts of resistances., or performative rituals,

### **The Empirical Case**

As previously described, this case study explores two stages of Paludan and Hard Line’s campaign. The first stage covers the party’s efforts to secure enough endorsements to stand for election. This stage lasted from October 2017 to May 6, 2019. The second stage covers the short election campaign from May 7 to June 6, 2019. The first part of the case is a brief description of the two stages, which pivots around the party’s breakthrough in the collection of endorsements, which happened on April 14, 2019. The second part is a portrayal of the two stages and the breaking point, but in metrics like collection of endorsements, news media mentions, posts on YouTube and Facebook. These are then followed by three different approaches to content analysis: First an analysis of the content for promoting political participation by Hard Line and Paludan. Second, then there is an analysis of the three dimensions of populism, i.e. a people dimension, an anti-establishment dimension, and an exclusion dimension. The last part of the case is a qualitative analysis of the performative acts of populist resistance.



## Getting onto the Ballot

The first stage of the case of a radical right-wing populist party way to the ballots is an exploration of how a party, with limited access to the news media, use social media platforms and become eligible to stand for election. Getting onto the ballot for parliamentary elections is a hard and slow process for most parties, but for a radical right-wing populist party with extreme policies, like the right-wing identity and libertarian politics of Hard Line, it seemed more than difficult. The objective for Paludan and Hard Line was to secure the endorsements, in the form of signed affidavits, equal to the number of votes needed for one seat in parliament, i.e. 20.109 endorsements, before the announcement of the next general election.

In late October 2017, during the campaign for the local elections, the party started collecting the endorsements. For one and a half year, Paludan and Hard Line were going through a slow process of exercising Paludan's constitutional right to protest,



staging events in ghetto areas in Denmark, antagonising people and trying to provoke response from people living there, while continuously publishing the performance on YouTube and Facebook, and not getting much attention from the news media. And when Paludan did get news media attention, it was either portrayed as an Internet phenomenon popular among young children and teens on YouTube (Sjöberg, 2018), or as the party leader, whose party was using a loophole in the endorsement process to increase the number of endorsements (Raatz & Festersen, 2019). This process lasted until May 6, 2019, when the party announced (Stram Kurs, 2019f) that it had collected 21.612 endorsements, more than needed.

## A Change of Venue

The breaking point during the first stage of their activities happened on April 14, 2019, when Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line moved the performance to the centre of Nørrebro, one of the most densely populated quarters of Copenhagen, with more than 80.000 people living in the area. Nørrebro used to be a working class, low income neighbourhood. It is still is, but the quarter has also become the gentrified home for many young people studying in Copenhagen, and it has been the epicentre for the Danish punk-movement living in occupied houses. It is also considered the multi-

*Screengrab from a Hard Line video from April 14, 2019: Paludan is interviewed by TV2.*

cultural part of the city, where citizens of many different ethnic origins live<sup>8</sup>. It has also been a long-standing stronghold of left-wing parties, like the Red-Green Alliance and Socialist Peoples' Party. The quarter has a long history of political confrontations and civil conflict. It has frequently been the battleground for clashes between protesters and police, most notably among them the long-lasting occupy movement in the 1980s, but also the violent clashes with police shooting on demonstrators following the referendum on May 18, 1993, when Danes voted No to the Edinburgh treaty. When Danish news media report on civil unrest, Nørrebro usually serves as the scenic backdrop. Right-wing politicians are less than welcome in the quarter, and once Pia Kjærsgaard, one of the founders of the Danish Peoples' Party, had to leave with a massive police escort after she was invited on air to do a live radio interview in Nørrebro for the Danish Broadcasting Company (Local Eyes, 1998). If you want a guarantee for lots of noise and massive news media coverage, that is where you go as a right-wing politician.

On April 14, Rasmus Paludan entered a central square in the quarter, Blaagaards Plads, with a heavy police escort. Paludan began hurling the Quran into the air, then tossed it back and forth to a party member, who had accompanied him, and in less than a minute, they were attacked by a few locals, protesting against Paludan's appearance. Shortly hereafter, Paludan and the other Hard Line members were escorted away from the square in a police vehicle. The event lasted five minutes. Immediately after Paludan had been escorted out of the quarter, clashes between anti-Hard Line protestors and the police started. Almost as predictable, the event also triggered massive news media attention, with the television stations news channels going into breaking news mode and transmitting from the scene of the riots. And only a few kilometres away, Rasmus Paludan was introduced on national television, as the *main character at the scene of the events of the day*, and giving his account of how he had been attacked by "people, and in particular very religious people, who commit a lot of violence and crimes". The next day, the Danish tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* ran an all caps headline "NØRREBRO IN FLAMES AFTER PALUDAN PERFORMANCE" (Ehrenschild et al., 2019)<sup>9</sup>. The frontpage of the competing tabloid, B.T., showed a picture of a policeman in riot gear standing in a street while the surroundings are burning,

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<sup>8</sup> In 2016, 80.066 people lived in Nørrebro, which is known as a multi-ethnic neighbourhood. descendants. Around 75 different ethnic groups live in Nørrebro. The majority is of Danish descent, but in 2015, 18.4 percent were immigrants or descendants of immigrants, many are from Middle Eastern countries, mostly stateless Palestinians, and but Nørrebro is also the home of large groups of Somalians (Vilhelm, 2016). The average age is of people living in Nørrebro is 33,5 years and the citizens have the second lowest income among citizens in Copenhagen (Københavns Kommune, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> My translation. The original headline is: "NØRREBRO I FLAMMER EFTER PALUDANOPTRÆDEN".

and their headline was “NØRREBRO AMOK” (B.T., 2019). In the following week, the police barred Paludan from appearing in areas with increased tension. The move did not prevent more rioting, but it also spurred more news reports, adding freedom of speech to the coverage. According to Infomedia, a combined total of 2.662 news reports were filed from April 14 to April 21 covering rioting, Rasmus Paludan, and Hard Line. Curiously, Paludan and Hard Line did not post anything on YouTube or Facebook until April 15 in the early morning<sup>10</sup>. With the increased media attention, traffic on social media platforms increased in the following days, and the combination led to a dramatic increase in voter endorsements. Eventually on May 6, 2019, the party announced that it had collected the needed endorsements and it was not approved by the Election Board to stand in the upcoming general election.

### The Populist Playbook

The timing of Hard Line’s approval of participation in the general election in 2019 could not have been better for the party. The day after the party announced that it had collected sufficient endorsements for standing, the prime minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, called the election on May 7. The party still had the momentum in the news media, and on YouTube and Facebook as well. Candidates being locked out of their Facebook accounts. On Twitter, the party had a short-lived appearance until it had its account shutdown. Now that the party was officially a part of the election campaign, the party leader was secured participation in all major television debates and the party was given the opportunity to present itself and its policies on national television, just like the other parties in the election.



In his first response on Facebook to the election call, Rasmus Paludan posted a video - recorded on the fly using a smartphone, with Paludan staged in the television studio of TV2 Denmark in the central train station in Copenhagen and with a large crowd in background. Earlier in the day, Paludan had participated in the first debate with the party leaders on the other main national television channel, Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DBC, and in the short video, he used the video to berate the “left-wing, biased traitors of the DBC”, lament *Illustration 3: Paludan's response to the election call.*

<sup>10</sup> According to the timestamp from YouTube, Hard Line published an “unedited video” of the event at 04:55:31. On Facebook, Hard Line published a video at 08:40:02 and Rasmus Paludan at 08:42:22

the lack of relevance of the other party leaders, and he then concluded the video by reiterating the party's two main election issues: First, the deportation of the enemies of Denmark, and second, a Denmark for the Danes. This first response is a good example of how mediatization works.

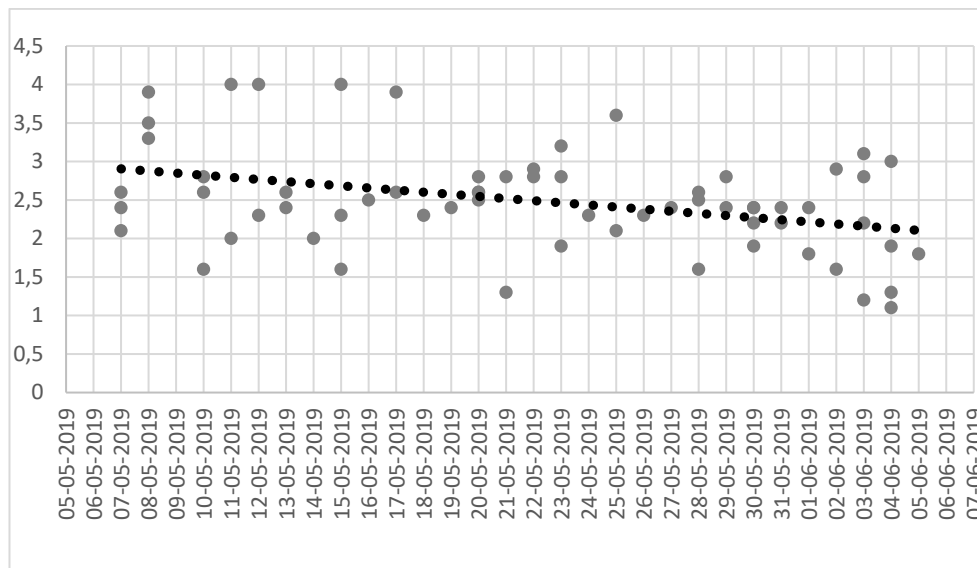
During the short election campaign, Paludan and Hard Line had to adapt to the pace, the formal rules and regulations, and the rigor of election campaigning. Most importantly, the party had to find willing candidates to represent the party in all multimember constituencies and to present them to the voters and the media. The party and Rasmus Paludan also had to adapt to the media events planned by the broadcast news media, such as television interviews by the news media, participating in debates, but also to the participation in more talk show programmes on radio and television. And adding to the list, party and Paludan had to be responsive to the other parties, their candidates, and the pundits in the news media, who were highly critical of Hard Line's policies. Across the political spectrum, it was argued by liberal and conservative politicians and in the news media as well, that there was a need for the establishment of a cordon sanitaire for Hard Line (Lyhne, 2019). The incumbent prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP) (Jessen, 2019), as well as the party leader of the Conservative Party, Søren Pape Poulsen (Thobo-Carlson & Klarskov, 2019) rejected any thought of building a future liberal-conservative government coalition based on the support of Hard Line.

In the course of the short campaign, Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line also staged their own media events, which included a demonstrations and meetings, but also more curious campaign and media events, like Rasmus Paludan promise to the Little Belt, a sound between the peninsular Jutland and the island Funen. The swim, which was shared by Hard Line on YouTube and Facebook (Hard Line, 2019), attracted news media attention (Ritzau, 2019b), since it was strange and spectacular, but also because it was regarded as a commentary of a similar swim made for the party leader of the Social Liberal Party, Morten Østergaard. In March 2019, Østergaard had swum to protest against the creation of an exit centre for unwanted refugees on the island Lindholm (Ritzau, 2019a).



*Illustration 4: Paludan on a campaign swim.*

The imminent collapse and fragmentation of the Danish right-wing parties was a central theme in the general election since the collapse would be important for shifting the power balance in parliament. In the short campaign, opinion polls showed that the Danish Peoples' Party could lose between 7 and 13 percentage points of the votes<sup>11</sup>, when compared to the general election in 2015. The opinion polls also showed that the New Right and Hard Line were attracting voters from the Danish Peoples' Party, but not enough to compensate for the loss of votes among the right-wing parties.



*Illustration 5: Hard Line in the Opinion Polls from May 7 to June 5, 2019. The black line shows the linear regression of the polls.*

The opinion polls for Hard Line, from May 7 to June 5, 2019, showed that although Hard Line was declining in the polls, the party seemed to make it past the electoral threshold of 2 percent. Even if the party did not clear the electoral threshold, there was a remote possibility of the party achieving representation in parliament, could it win enough votes in one of the multimember constituencies for one seat. During the short campaign, the news media reported on Hard Line in the opinion polls in 793 news reports, according to Infomedia<sup>12</sup>. For the news media, opinion polls have become

<sup>11</sup> On May 7, the day the election was called, the opinion poll from Epinion showed the Danish Peoples' Party receiving 13,9 percent of the votes. That was also the best poll for the party. The worst was supplied by YouGov on June 2, in which the party polled at 8,3 percent of the votes. The result of the general election was 8,7 percent for the party.

<sup>12</sup> The 793 news media reports, which were registered by Infomedia, a the Danish news media monitoring agency, were distributed among 517 reports in online media, 135 reports in regional and local daily newspapers, 102 reports in national newspapers, 21 reports in reports from the news agencies, 11 reports on television, 4 reports in magazines, and finally, 3 reports in local weekly newspapers. The Infomedia database was queried using the party name, 'Stram Kurs' and 'meningsmåling' covering the period from May 7 to June 6, 2019.

part of the news media logic that governs mass media election coverage<sup>13</sup>. As observed by Cushion and Thomas (2018), opinion polls may be a valuable help for reporting on elections, since they give a more accurate representation of the voters' mood, than vox pops or individual journalists interpretation of the publics' mood. Opinion polls may help journalists understand the publics' reaction to candidates and parties, and opinion polls may help to inform and shape the news media agenda. As media events, opinion polls are interesting, since they contribute to news reporting in several ways. First, the outcome, however insecure, is a great backdrop for speculation among journalists, pundits, and political commentators, because it opens for questions in which the interest is of politics as a horseracing game, answering questions like *who is winning*, *who is losing*, and *how much*? Second, opinion polls, like other forms of media events, add to the election coverage in terms of agenda-setting, news management, and strategic campaign communication.

In the course of the short election campaign, it seems that Paludan and Hard Line are influenced by the political logic of the campaign, but also by the underlying media logics, including media presence, media debates, and media events. The party's political themes shift from the exclusionary policies to criticism of the political establishment and the media elite.

### **The Metric Tale**

Another way of describing the first stage of the rise of Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line is by using the endorsements the party needed for standing in the election as a timeline, as in the graph below. For almost the entire duration of this stage, very little happened. On good days, the party was receiving around 200 endorsements, but on ordinary days, the party would collect less than 50 endorsements. Remarkably, the party collected 16.673 endorsements from March 27 to April 27, 2019, meaning that 77,1 percent of the endorsements were gathered within the last month.

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<sup>13</sup> Obviously, here the use of opinion polls is considered in context of the Danish media system, the specific Danish news media logic and political logic. For a more extensive discussions of opinion polls and media systems, see Cushion and Thomas' (2018) *Reporting Elections* or Holtz-Bacha and Strömbäck's (2012) *Opinion Polls and the Media. Reflecting and Shaping Public Opinion*.

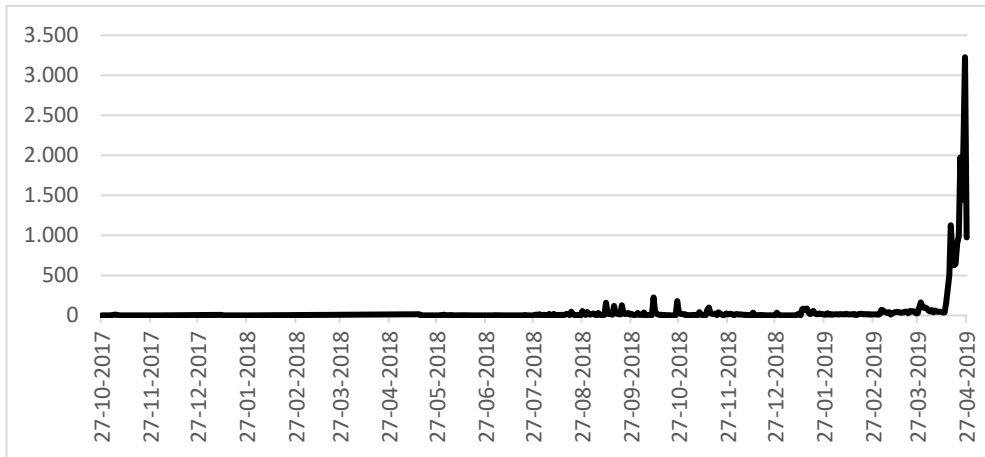


Illustration 6: Endorsements for the party Hard Line, from October 17, 2017 to April 27, 2019.

The corresponding statistics for the mention of Rasmus Paludan in news media reports reveal a similar pattern. From March 2018 to March 2019, Paludan was mentioned 1.625 times in different types of news media reports, but in April 2019, Paludan was mentioned 4.085 times. From March 2018 to April 2019, Rasmus Paludan appeared in a total of 5.710 news reports according to Infomedia.

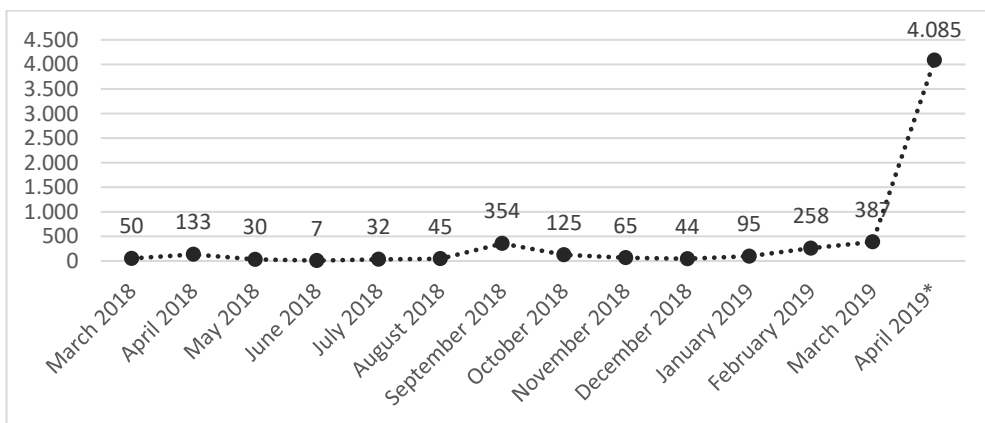
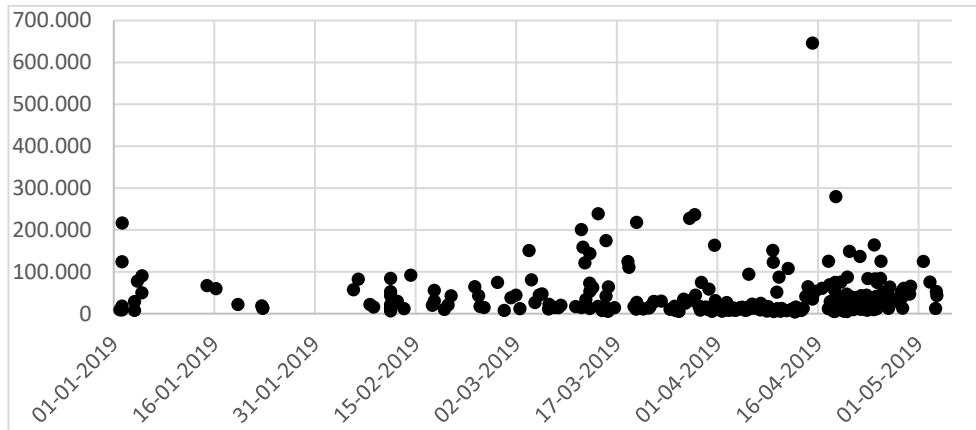


Illustration 7: Mentions of Paludan in the news media from March 2018 to April 2019. Source: Infomedia. N = 5.710.

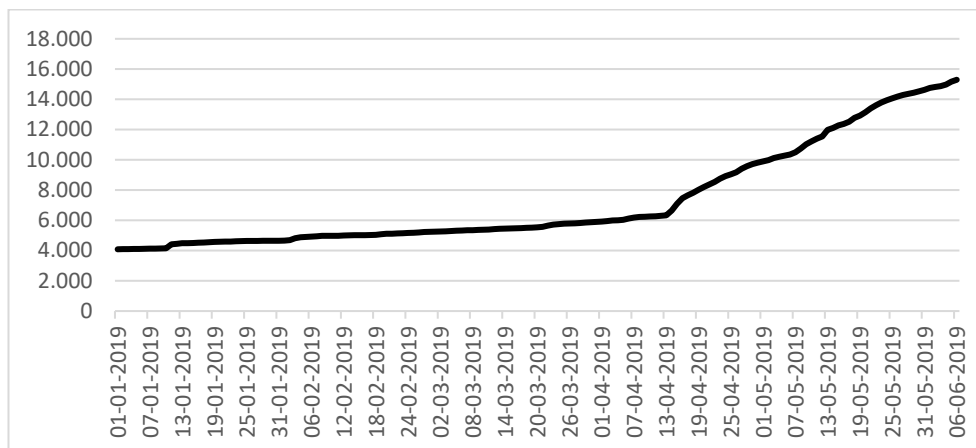
On YouTube there appears to a similar pattern. From January 1 to May 7, 2019, Hard Line published 276 videos on the party’s YouTube channel. 26 of Hard Line’s videos have been viewed more than 100.000 times, but most of the party’s videos had considerably lower view counts<sup>14</sup>. The maximum view count is 645.757 views, the lowest is 3.480, the mean view count is 42.101, and the median view count is 20.797 views.

<sup>14</sup> It is not entirely clear, how long a viewer must view a video before YouTube tally the view in the view count, but generally it is thought to be at least thirty seconds.



*Illustration 8: View count of the videos posted on Hard Line's channel on YouTube, January 1 to May 7, 2019.*

On Facebook, the party leader's number of followers on Facebook had grown moderately until April 14, 2019. But after the events on April 14, the number of followers increased significantly. The party leader's number of followers increased 36,7 percent in the passing of the three previous weeks, from 6.645 followers on April 14 to 10.497 followers on May 7, the day the election was called.



*Illustration 9: Paludan's followers on Facebook, from January 1 to June 6, 2019.*

During the short campaign, Paludan's follower count continued to surge and at election day he had 15.162 followers. Similarly, the party's followers on Facebook also grew during the short campaign, from 13.152 followers on May 7 to 18.583 followers on June 6, 2019.

## **YouTube**

The general election was called on May 7, but Hard Line and Rasmus Paludan did not post anything on YouTube before May 8, 2019. From May 8 to June 7, 2019, Hard Line posted 111 videos on YouTube. The distribution and view count are seen below.



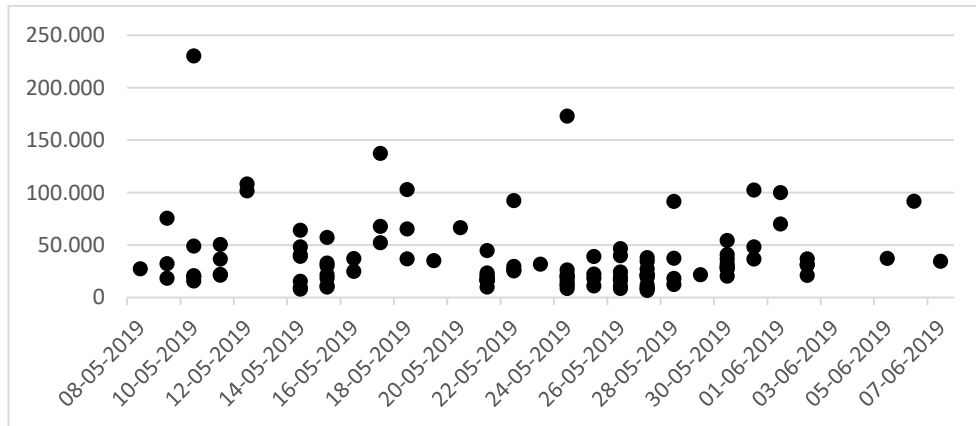


Illustration 10: Hard Line posted 111 videos on YouTube from May 8 to June 7, 2019.

About ten of Hard Line's videos have view counts around or above 100.000 views, but most videos have considerably lower view counts. The maximum view count is 230.114, the lowest is 6.532, the mean view count is 37.424, and the median view count is 26.572 views.

## Content Analysis

### Participation

**Stram Kurs**  
7. april 2019 · 🌐

**Vi brænder koranen dvs. De Store Luderbog i Skive i dag!**

**Stram Kurs**  
12. januar 2019 · 🌐

Lokalavisen Aarhus har skrevet om vores kommende demonstrationer



AARHUS.LOKALAVISEN.DK

🟢 Provpolitikerne Paludan varsler demonstrationer med koranabranding: Skyder skylden på Østjyllands Politi



*Illustration 11: Four dimensions of political participation: information, diffusion, promotion, and instruction (from left to bottom right), from Hard Line's Facebook page.*

Using the model for political participation by Dutceac Segesten and Bossetta (2017), the content from Hard Line's YouTube channel and Facebook Page, as well as Rasmus Paludan's Facebook Page is divided into four dimensions, 'information', 'diffusion', 'promotion', and 'instruction'. In their participatory matrix, 'information' refers to original content without a call for action, and it can take any number of different visual and textual forms and posting types depending on the social media platform used. An example of the form like could be like the update posted on Facebook April 7, 2019 (Stram Kurs, 2019a)<sup>15</sup>: "We will burn the Quran, the Great Whorebook, in Skive today!!!" (top left image above). The 'diffusion' dimension refers to shared content without a call for action. Shared content may come from other users on social media platforms or, as is often the case among political actors, reports from the news media, e.g. "The Local paper Aarhus has written about our upcoming demonstrations" (Stram Kurs, 2019c)<sup>16</sup> (top right image). The 'promotion' dimension refers to shared content as well, but the promotional aspect includes a call for action. An example of this dimension is Stram Kurs sharing content from their website (bottom left image) accompanied by a short video clip calling for users to get more information on a specific policy on the website, "See more on <https://stramkurs.dk/skolevalg/>" (Stram Kurs, 2019d)<sup>17</sup>. The 'instruction' dimension refers to original content which contains a call for action. An example of such a call for action could be the

<sup>15</sup> My translation. The original text is: "Vi brænder koranen dvs. Den Store Luderbog i Skive i dag!!!"

<sup>16</sup> My translation. The original text is: "Lokalavisen Aarhus har skrevet om vores kommende demonstrationer."

<sup>17</sup> My translation. The original text is: "Se mere på <https://stramkurs.dk/skolevalg/>".

party's Facebook (bottom right image) made on April 18, 2019 (Stram Kurs, 2019e)<sup>18</sup>, in which the party asks for voter endorsements.

The Quran is a piece of garbage! (Viborg, April 13, 2019)

Give a FREE and ANONYMOUS voter endorsement for  
Hard Line: <https://stramkurs.dk/v/>

For the demonstration in Viborg today, Hard Line Stram Kurs brought the Quran, which we used the day before to play 5-Quran in Skive.

In the first stage, the dominating type of content on Hard Line's YouTube channel was the instruction type, with the information type as a clear second. In the second stage, the short election campaign, there is a switch of content types, so the information type is the dominant content form. The party did not push the diffusion or the promotion types in either of the two stages.

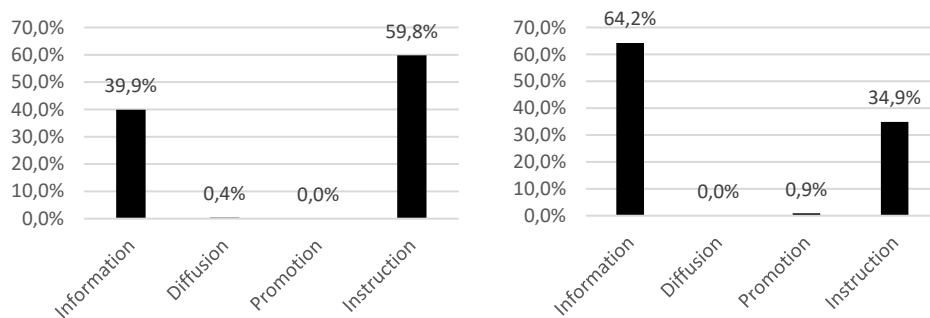


Illustration 12: Content types posted to Hard Line's YouTube channel from January 1 to May 6, 2019 (left) and from May 7 to June 6, 2019.

On Facebook there is a similar pattern on Hard Line and Rasmus Paludan's pages, where the dominant content types are instructions and information. But unlike on YouTube, the party regularly promoted the content type diffusion. Rasmus Paludan was more frequently sharing content without calls for action, than the party. Below are two bar charts of the content types posted to Hard Line and Rasmus Paludan's Facebook pages.

<sup>18</sup> My translation. The original text is: "Koranen er et stykke affald! (Viborg, 13. april 2019)  
Giv GRATIS og ANONYMT en vælgererklæring til Stram Kurs: <https://stramkurs.dk/v/>  
Stram Kurs havde til demonstrationen i Viborg medbragt den koran, som vi dagen før spillede 5-Koran med i Skive."

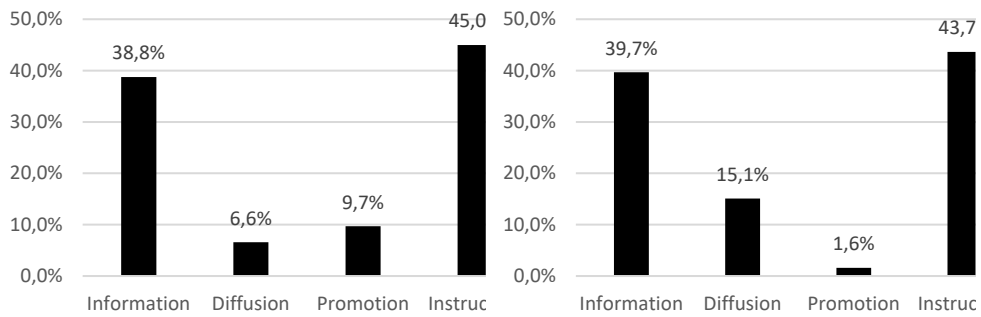


Illustration 13: Content types posted to Hard Line (left) and Rasmus Paludan’s Facebook pages from January 1 to May 6, 2019.

During the first stage, Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line posted information regularly, but during and after events, both switched to posting instructions. The graph below, which covers information and instructions posts in April, illustrates this point. In the days following the breaking point on April 14, 2019, virtually all posts contained calls for action, i.e. instruction users to endorse the party.

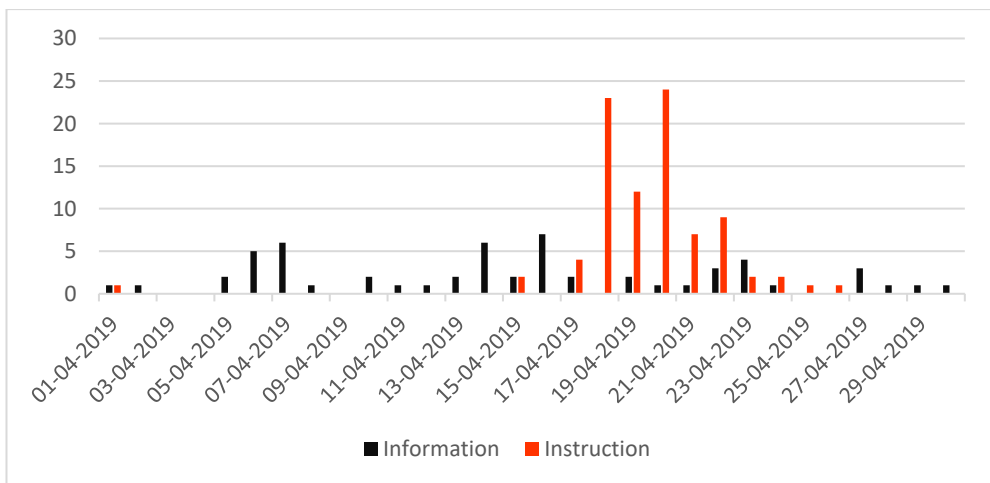


Illustration 14: The use of information and instructions: Content types posted to Hard Line (left) and Rasmus Paludan’s Facebook pages from January 1 to May 6, 2019.

In the second stage, the dominating content type was information for Rasmus Paludan as well as Hard Line. The party and Paludan, but to a lesser degree, were still pushing instructions. The other content types were hardly used.

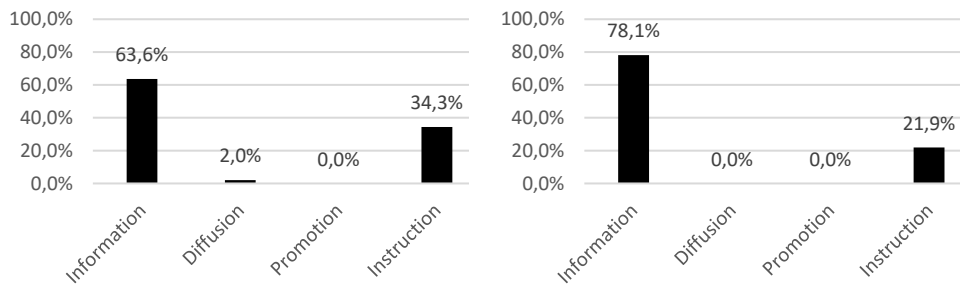
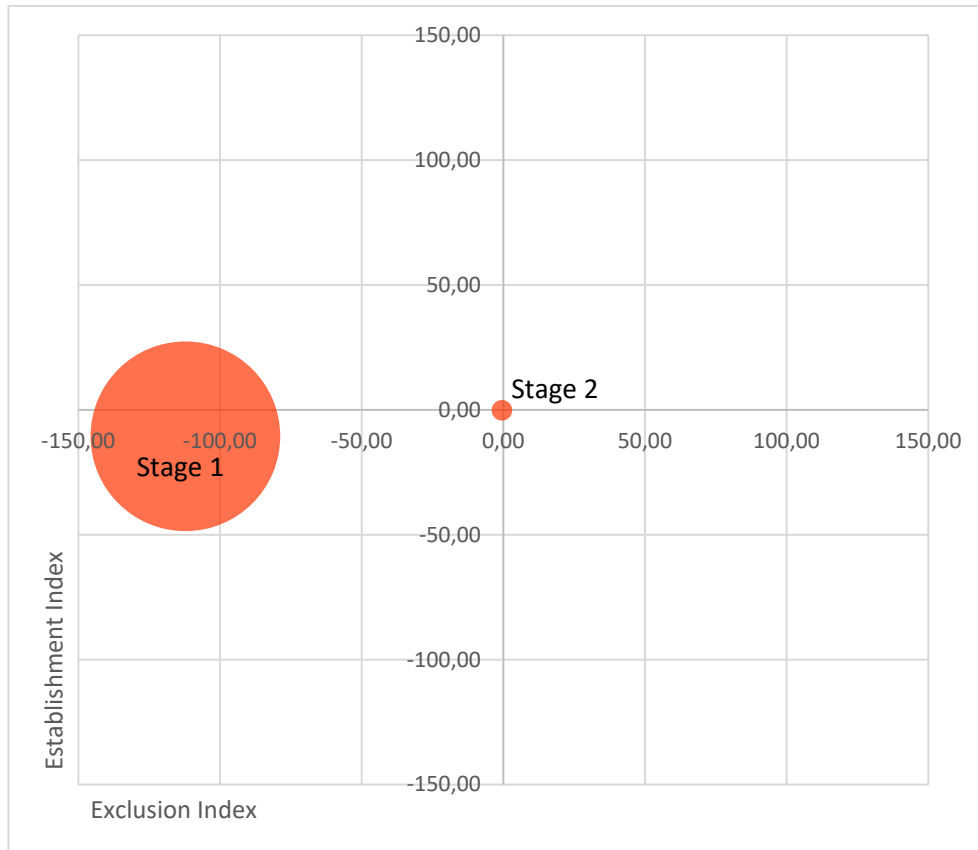


Illustration 15: Content types posted to Hard Line (left) and Rasmus Paludan's Facebook pages from May 7 to June 6, 2019

### The Three Dimensions of Populism

In exploring the dimensions of populism, I am applying the method suggested by Jagers and Walgrave (2007), as outlined in the methods section. The content is divided into an index of thin populism, i.e. the mention of *the people*, an index of the anti-establishment sentiments, constructed by three minor dimensions, an anti-state index, an anti-politics index, and an anti-media index, expressed by the parties, and finally, to an index of exclusion. In comparing the two stages, the process is applied to both stages, in which the scores of the indexes are used to create an output capturing the relationship between them and the two stages.

In exploring the dimensions of populism on Hard Line's YouTube channel for the two stages, the three indexes are expressed in the diagram below. The dots are positioned on two dimensions, the establishment index on the vertical axis and the exclusion index on the horizontal axis, according to the indexed scores. The size of the dots indicates the scale of the people index. In the first stage, Hard Line are giving much attention to the dimension of *the people*, and while less attention is paid to the establishment, the exclusion index is very negative.



*Illustration 16: Exploring the dimensions of populism on Hard Line's YouTube channel, 2019.*

In the second stage, the short election campaign, Hard Line scaled down criticism on all three indexes on YouTube. Had it not been because its previous posts or manifested policies, the party could be perceived as a mainstream political party.

The posts, which get registered on the people index, could contain statements referring to the people, the Danes, Danish citizens, or people living in Denmark, and they can take on the form of a simple statement such as “I fight, so your children can live in a free Denmark”, posted on YouTube, March 1, 2019<sup>19</sup>, or like the statement “Party leader Rasmus Paludan: I live of the love of the people”, posted on YouTube on April 22, 2019<sup>20</sup>. But typical posts often compound elements from the people index with elements from other indexes. A typical post from the first stage could then be the following post from March 14., 2019, apparently recorded on March 3, 2019, which also includes a call to action<sup>21</sup>:

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Denmark for the Danes - Kurdistan for the Kurds. (Frederikshavn, 3.3.2019) Give Hard Line a voter endorsement for free here: <http://www.stramkurs.dk/v/> During Hard Lines demonstration in Frederikshavn on Sunday March 3, 2019, party leader Rasmus Paludan had to explain to a young Kurd, that they want the same thing: An ethnonational state for their people. Party leader Paludan also explained to the young Kurds, that it could hardly be Denmark and the Danish people's problem, that the Kurds had not achieved their goals. Rasmus is just fighting to secure that the Danes do not lose their country to (among others) the Kurds.

The post is registered on the people index and on the exclusion index, but not on the anti-establishment index. Another sample of a post that with be registered on the exclusion index and in the people index, could be the following posted on YouTube on March 26, 2019, but it was recorded on March 2 in the city of Hjørring<sup>22</sup>:

Bacon à la Quran (Hjørring, 2.3.2019) Give Hard Line a voter endorsement for free here: <http://www.stramkurs.dk/v/>  
A local Danish patriot set fire to the Great Whorebook (the Quran) in Hjørring on March 2., 2019. Before the burning the Paedophile Handbook was stuffed with raw bacon. Muhammad was a paedophile murderer.

The anti-establishment index is based on three minor dimensions, which based on the addition of a positive, neutral, and negative scores of each post in each index. The first index, the anti-state index, contains posts, in which the content is directed at state functions such as ministers and ministries, public officials, civil servants, the police, or in other words the societal institutions which represent authority. A sample of a post on YouTube, which is included in the anti-state index, could be this post from March 8: “The less respectfully police commanders talk to me, the more I demonstrate”<sup>23</sup>, or this post from March 28, in which Hard Line complain about the lack of competences inn the police: “During Hard Line’s demonstration in Nakskov on Saturday March 23, 2019, the security was so poor, that the police commander had to move the demonstration to a more secure location”<sup>24</sup>.

The second index, the anti-politics index, contains posts which mention political actors, such as other political parties or politicians, in the content, which is then evaluated in a similar way to the anti-state index. In a sample

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post from YouTube, posted on April 13, 2019, Hard Line attacks the other right wing parties:

During Hard Line’s demonstration in Nakskov on Saturday March 23, 2019, party leader Rasmus Paludan explained, that the Danish People’s Party and the New Right are not at all competitors to Hard Line. In comparison, Danish People’s Party and the New Right have very weak immigration policies”<sup>25</sup>.

The third index, the anti-media index, contains posts in which mention media actors, e.g. news media outlets, individual journalists, or the news media as an entity, and the sentiment towards the media actors differs considerably. In a sample of a neutral post, from April 20, the party writes, “Party leader Rasmus Paludan is interviewed by the local media in Skive”<sup>26</sup>. But the party also use YouTube to express its lack of trust in the news media, which is also known as a stigma used among radical right-wing parties and movements as the *lying press* or the fake news (Holt & Haller, 2017; Koliska & Assmann, 2019). On March 26, the party posts: “During the Hard Line demonstration in Jomfru Ane Gade in Aalborg on Saturday March 16, 2019, party leader Rasmus Paludan explained, that Nordjyske Stiftstidende is full of lies”<sup>27</sup>. Similar in a post from May 6, 2019, in which the party comments on the radio broadcaster, Radio24Seven: “Party leader Rasmus Paludan from Hard Line addresses the harassment and invasion of privacy, which Radio24Seven and the rest of the lying press are using against him personally.”<sup>28</sup>

Finally, there is the exclusion index, which is based on references to immigrants, refugees, ethnicity, race, and religion. Like the other indexes, the exclusion index which is based on the addition of the score of each post in the index. One sample of posts included in the exclusion index, is this one posted on YouTube on March 15: “The Quran is burning: They must not be integrated; They must go home!”<sup>29</sup>. In another post, from March 15, Rasmus Paludan had “to explain that the citizens in the shit-countries unfortunately cannot copy Denmark’s or Western European’s ethical or economic success, because the shit-countries’ citizens lack the will and skills for this”<sup>30</sup>.

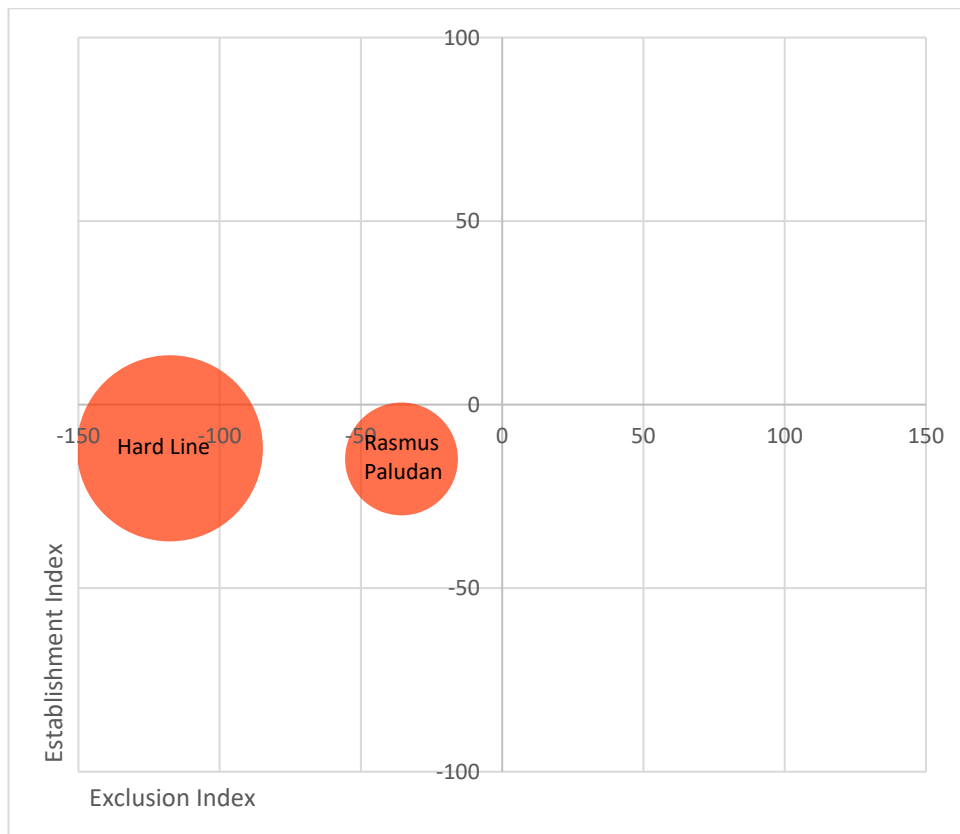
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<sup>29</sup> My translation. The original text is: “Koran Brænder: De Skal Ikke Integreres; De Skal Hjem!”

<sup>30</sup> My translation. The original text is: “Under Stram Kurs' demonstration i Frederikshavn søndag den 3. marts 2019 måtte partileder Rasmus Paludan forklare, at indbyggerne i lortelandene desværre ikke kan kopiere Danmarks og Vesteuropas etiske og økonomiske succes, fordi lortelandenes indbyggere mangler vilje og evne til dette.”



Applying the model to Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line’s Facebook pages reveals similar shifts between the two stages, from extreme positions on the exclusion index to less extreme positions, but also changes in the directions of the criticism. In the first stages, Paludan and the party take strong stands against immigrants and Muslims, though the party’s position is expressed much more explicitly, while talk about the people is strong as well. Their positions on the anti-establishment index are moderately negative, and the criticism is mainly directed towards the police’s handling of demonstrations, and progressively less towards the news media and the political elite.



*Illustration 17: The three dimensions of populism on Facebook in the first stage.*

In the second stage, the short election campaign, both Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line toned down the criticism on the exclusion index, displaying less adversity towards immigrants, refugees, Muslims, etc. There is an interesting shift in the people index too, but it only seems to apply to Rasmus Paludan, who speaks considerably less about the people.

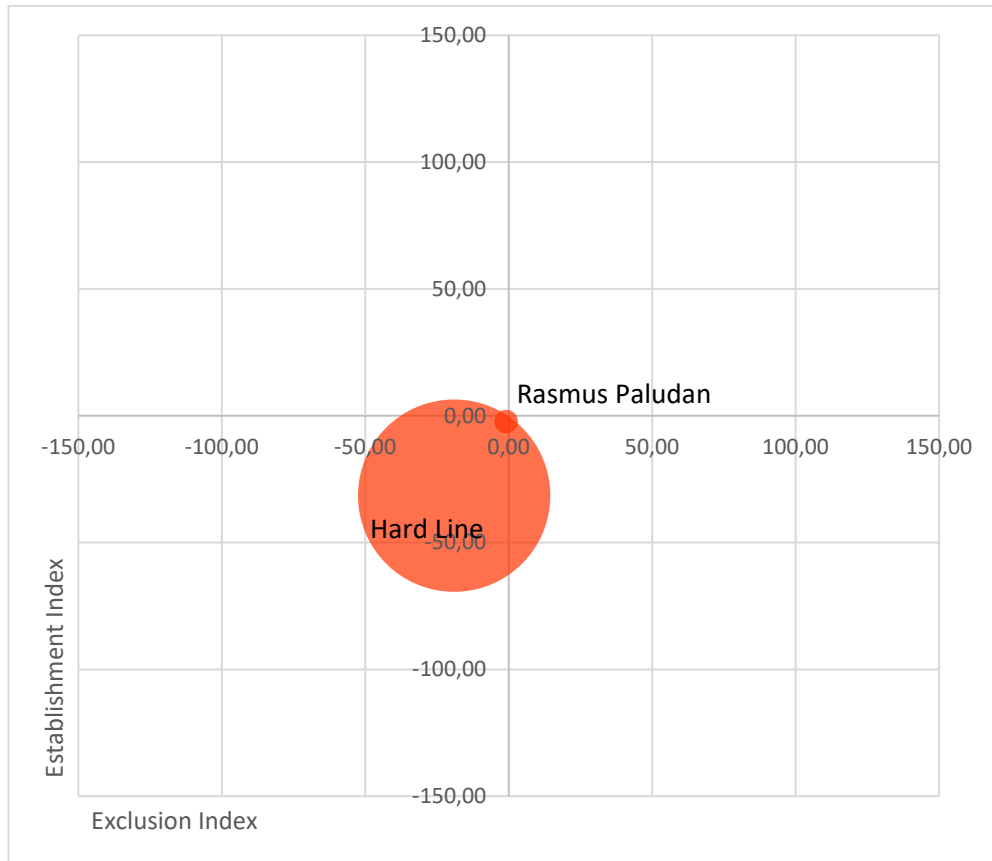


Illustration 18: The three dimensions of populism on Facebook in the first stage.

There is also a shift in the anti-establishment index during the short election campaign, which marks a change in direction of the criticism of Paludan as well as the party. While Paludan continues to criticise the media elite and the political elite, his criticism of the state authorities is reduced. The party, however, increased its criticism of the media elite and the political elite considerably. The obvious explanation for the shifts within the anti-establishment index is the change of political arena. In the first stage, Paludan and the party were far more engaged in demonstrations, whereas in the second stage, they adapt to the traditional electoral arena.

### Performing Resistance

The volume of Hard Line's videos on YouTube channel spans 386 videos from January 1 to June 6, 2019, and since most of them share the same performative aspects, the five videos I have chosen for the analysis of populist resistance are also among the most viewed on YouTube. I would have but the fifth video, posted on May 05, called *Dialogue with soyboy beta male on Brønshøj Torv* was not available.

Date	Message	View Count	Likes	Dislikes	Comments
15-04-2019	Paludan attacked on Blågård's Plads	645.757	4.258	4.307	1.964
18-04-2019	Rasmus Paludan hit with a rock in the back of the head in Viborg	279.330	1.787	1.683	643
14-03-2019	An attempted dialogue with a fool who does not speak Danish.	238.416	1.263	574	447
28-03-2019	People ridicule you in Iraq too, Mahdi!	236.169	1.801	1.460	460
10-05-2019	Dialogue with soyboy beta male on Brønshøj Torv	231.308	1.602	500	666
27-03-2019	Wallah, you have to take Quran away from him!	227.391	1.547	1.479	624

*Table 1: The five most viewed videos on Hard Line's YouTube channel January 1 to June 6, 2019.*

The ten most viewed videos on Hard Line's YouTube channel are also those which generates most interaction. The most viewed video got more dislikes, than likes, and several of the following videos show many dislikes as well. But the 257.789 interactions in terms of likes and dislikes for the 386 videos posted on Hard Lines YouTube channel, show that 71.8 percent of the interactions are likes, and 28.2 percent are dislikes.

In general, the videos are recorded at the sites of Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line's demonstration, and most of them are just posted as unedited, continuous recordings, almost documentary in form. In some of the videos produced before the second stage, a generic call to action is added to the end of the videos. In these generic calls, Rasmus Paludan is wearing what appears to be a coat cut like a military coat with shoulder straps. In these ends, Paludan calls for support or voter endorsements. In the last frames, Paludan performs his signature hand sign, V for Victory, while he says "Victory!".



*Illustration 19: Paludan signs V for Victory*

The first and most viewed video on YouTube, with a view count of 645.757 views, was posted to YouTube on April 15, but it was recorded on April 14, the day Rasmus Paludan visited Nørrebro. In the video, Rasmus Paludan is followed in a continuous recording from the moment he enters Nørrebro with

a heavy police escort and walks to a central square in the quarter, called Blaagaards Plads. In the square, Paludan walks to a designated area, which is marked by the police for his demonstration and is surrounded by a security perimeter, guarded by numerous police officers. Apart from Paludan and the police, very few people are visible in the square. Once in place, Paludan showing the V-sign and waves to the crowd, i.e. the few people, who are observing him from a distance, and then he introduces himself to the camera and delivers a short speech<sup>31</sup>:

I am Rasmus Paludan, the soldier of freedom, protector of the weak, the guardian of society, the light of the Danes, the source of peace, hope of the North, the messenger of truth, the creator of peace, and party leader for Hard Line. And now, I am standing in Blågårds Plads in Copenhagen on Nørrebro, a district that has been ravaged by gang warfare between Loyal to Familia and Brothas, among others. And that is why it is important to come here, of course, but the demonstration today should actually have taken place at Mjølnerparken. However, the Copenhagen Police, in collaboration with PET and others, decided that it was not possible. And so, I had to choose another place. And I chose Blågårds Plads because it used to be the stronghold of Loyal to Familia. I think the stronghold of Loyal to Familia currently is Vestre Prison and Nyborg State Prison, because the vast majority of criminal losers from in Loyal to Familia are inside. But that does not change that today's theme is neither LTF nor Brothas. No, today's theme is Omar El-Hussein, this son of a whore, this horrible, horrible terrorist murderer, who murdered two innocent people, Finn Nørgaard and Dan Uzan in February 2015 during the terrorist attack in Copenhagen, against Krudttønden and the Synagogue, and also wounded five police officers. So, it is against the terrible, horrible, horrible, evil, evil killer that we demonstrate. The terrorist Omar El-Hussein must be purged. For eternal shame on him, we will also play five Quran and burn the great Whorebook, the Quran. All this is necessary on our way to the ultimate goal, Denmark's survival. And we will achieve Denmark's survival. And when we have achieved it, when we have achieved our final goal, of which I will now remind you, I will show the V-sign and say Victory!

Following the speech, Paludan and the cameraman start playing five Quran, a game in which the Quran is tossed it back and forth in the air between the

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<sup>31</sup> My translation. See also the appendix: Paludan's Speech for the transcribed Danish version and an annotated English version.

participants and frequently dropped to the ground. After playing this for less than a minute, they are attacked by three people. While the police arrest one assailant and try to apprehend the other two, Paludan is dragged into a police vehicle for safety.

The duration of the video is ten minutes, but the event lasted less than five minutes. It During the short event, Paludan enacts four performative rituals. First, he enters the arena. The simple act of being in a hostile territory, in the ghetto, where he can only exercise his right to free speech because of a visible police protection, is a salient point of Paludan and Hard Line. And eventually, even this proves to be impossible. Second, he delivers his speech, even though no one in the square can hear him. Obviously, the speech is purely intended for the recording and the remote audience. In the speech, Paludan presents himself, as the ‘soldier of freedom’ and ‘the hope of the North’ standing in a district ‘ravaged’ by criminal losers and immigrant gangs, to exercise his right to speak the truth about a terrorist and burn the Quran. The speech itself contains several interesting discursive points, which deserves to be analysed in their own right, but for this case it is the speech as a performative ritual that is interesting. The third ritual Paludan and his cameraman perform is the game Five Quran. Since the Quran is understood as a holy text among Muslims, the game must seem sacrilegious to the religious or intolerant to the ordinary Muslim (kilde?). To Paludan and Hard Line, the Quran is a symbol of Muslim oppression, which limits free speech. To handle it with disrespect is then a form of resistance.







*Illustration 20: Screenshot from the Hard Line video, recorded April 14, 2019: Paludan on Blågård's Plads, Copenhagen.*

The fourth performative ritual is when Paludan is attacked. Here the active performance is played by the assailants, not by Paludan, but in the video the attack is used performatively to display the behaviour of the assailants. Paludan's enactment of these performative rituals have value because they are performed with the intention of being mediated. Had the events not been recorded or distributed on social media, the rituals would seem less powerful.

In the second video, which was posted to YouTube on April 18 and viewed 279.330 times, Rasmus Paludan is demonstrating in Viborg, when he is attacked and hit in the back of the neck by a rock. Angered by the attack, Paludan complains about the inadequate and incompetent police protection, and he accuses the police of collaborating with the local "criminal losers and terrorists". Paludan also accuses a girl of being in cahoots with the attacker, and then goes on to calling her a whore. This angers some of the participants, who are there protesting against Paludan's appearance, and this leads to heated arguments between Paludan and the protestors. The police then decide to increase the security perimeter, to avoid further physical action.





*Illustration 21: Screenshot from the Hard Line video posted April 18, 2019.*

While the police move the protestors away from Paludan, he is greeted by local supporters, which is one of the performative rituals in the video. But the event shows several other performative rituals. Obviously, the attack on Paludan can hardly be called a performative ritual enacted by Paludan. But the display of the attack is and so are Paludan's predictable reactions. In a democracy, a physical attack on someone exercising the right to free speech is an attack on democracy. It is a justifiable, legitimate reason to act performatively or to re-enact performative rituals. The attack becomes the right rhetorical moment, the Kairos, for Paludan to act, and to act in defence of democracy and in self-defence. And Paludan reacts against the attacker, against the small crowd assembled around his demonstration, and against the police.

The third video, posted on YouTube on March 14, which is called *an attempted dialogue with a fool who does not speak Danish*. In the first part of the video, Rasmus Paludan and one of the participants in the protest against Paludan are engaged in a discussion whether they should have a discussion. Paludan invites the protestor into his safety zone, and a theatrical discussion of sorts ensues. The participant asks Paludan questions about mutual respect, Paludan's lengthy answer is about the law and democracy. Then the participant starts to argue the points, at which point Paludan is visibly bored.



*Illustration 22: Screenshot from the Hard Line video posted March 14, 2019.*

In the video, two performative rituals are played out. First, there is the performance of dialogue, where Paludan takes the role as one who is willing to listen. And then there is the second - and related performative ritual, in which Paludan's lecturing the immigrant about democracy and freedom of speech.

The fourth video begins with Rasmus Paludan in what appears to be a heated argument with one of the participants from the protest against Paludan. In reality, it is mostly Paludan taunting and mocking the participant, trying to provoke him. Seeing he is not successful, Paludan takes out a Quran, opens it and spits in it. Then Paludan turns to the camera and delivers a short speech about the Muslims' ignorance of their own religion. After the speech, Paludan throws the Quran on the ground and steps on it. The video ends with Paludan participating in a selfie with one of the people from the crowd.



*Illustration 23: Screenshot from the Hard Line video posted March 28, 2019.*

In the video Paludan enacts several performative rituals. First, Paludan is acting out the resistance trope, as the one who dares to challenge the Muslims and their violent culture. This continues, when Paludan uses the Quran to incite protest among the crowd. When Paludan turns to the camera and delivers a short speech about the shortcomings of Muslims, he performs the ritual of the great explainer. In this role, Paludan tells the viewers what they have just seen and what they should think about it. Finally, Paludan plays the social media celebrity, when he makes himself available for selfies with the crowd.

In the fifth video, Rasmus Paludan and Hard Line are demonstrating in Copenhagen, just opposite the parliament building, Christiansborg. In the opening shot of the video, Paludan and other party members are playing the game Five Quran, which involves throwing the Quran from one participant to another. Loud yells are heard in the background, and the camera is turned towards the yelling. A protestor has jumped into the channel and, in what appears to be an attempt to bypass the police safe-guarding Paludan, he is swimming across the channel, towards the area, where Paludan and Hard Line are playing. When he appears from the water, he tells the police that he will get out of the water and they can arrest him as soon as they take away the Quran from Paludan.





*Illustration 24: Screenshot from the Hard Line video posted March 27, 2019.*

The rest of the video shows the negotiation between the protestor and the police, and eventually the surrender of the protestor. The commotion is being photographed and recorded by the news media, but apart from the opening shot, Paludan does not appear in the video and no political statements are made until the closing sequence, in which is generic closings produced by Hard Line. In the video, the first performative ritual is, once again, the game, Five Quran. The second performative ritual is the passive ritual, in which the folly of the protestor is presented.



*Screengrab from a video of Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen (LP) talking to his running mates in the general election in 2007. The video was posted to Facebook in 2008.*

### 5.3 Danish Elections and Campaigning

In this chapter, which covers the three general elections in the past decade, the overall focus is on how social media platforms have become increasingly central to electioneering and campaigning in Denmark. The case serves as a general introduction to the use of social media platforms in the general elections in 2011, 2015, and in 2019. The aim is to give a comprehensive account of how social media platforms were used in the campaigns and add context.

In the second part of this case, I explore how the candidates, party leaders, and parties have used social media platforms in each of the elections. The overall focus is on Facebook and Twitter, since those are the main platforms that candidates have used consistently throughout the years, but focus is not limited to those platforms. Adding to the case, I include widely used platforms, such as Instagram and LinkedIn, and lesser used platforms and digital services. In the final part of this case, I explore the relationship between the use of social media platforms and voting.

#### **Campaign Theory**

Election campaigns are conceptually different from other forms of strategic political communication. The main objective of the parties campaigning is to win the election, get candidates elected, and persuade voters to support the parties' political issues and programmes. For candidates, the main objective is to get elected. In Denmark, campaigns are characterized by being of a limited duration, the short campaigns usually last for three to four weeks and

the long campaign a little more than a year, and the campaigns all aim at one decisive point in time, election day, where it is determined who wins and who loses, who gets elected. Campaigning is partisan, adversarial, and competitive on all levels. Party leaders and parties try to convince voters that their policies are better and that their candidates are better equipped to run the country. In multiparty systems, party leaders use election campaigns to build coalitions with parties with similar visions and ideologies, while emphasizing the differences. Candidates compete with candidates from other parties, but also with candidates from their own, and so they need to persuade voters *why* they are the better choice. As such, campaigning is an exercise in mediated persuasion, and according to Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2014: 109) “election campaigns are nothing but political communication”.

In recent history of campaign evolution, campaigning in modern democracy is often conceptualized as three-stage models. In Blumler & Kavanagh’s (1999) version, the first age, the two decades after World War II, was known as “the ‘golden age’ of parties”. In the 1960s, when television became the dominant medium of political communication, the grip of “party loyalty on voters was loosening”. The third age in Blumler & Kavanagh’s model was marked by the “proliferation of the main means of communication, media abundance, ubiquity, reach, and celerity.” Television had become “an extensively elaborated journalistic medium, hosting news flashes and inserts, formed bulletins, a wide range of public affairs formats, and 24-hour news services”, but the communication abundance also reflected “the proliferation of communication equipment in people’s homes—multiple television and radio sets, video recorders, compact disc players, video games, and camcorders. Beyond mass media, political news, information, and ideas can be circulated via the computer”.

Campaigning and electioneering from the early 1990s and onwards were broadly categorized as postmodern campaigning (e.g. Norris, 2000; Strömbäck, 2007). According to Norris (2000: 178), the defining features of postmodern were the “professionalization of campaign consultants, the fragmentation of the news-media system, and the dealignment of the electorate”. What came to characterize the postmodern campaign was a perpetual form of campaigning in which governing and electioneering amalgamated into permanent campaigning, increasing liberalizations of the media markets, increased competition between different mass media, but also an increasing autonomy of mass media and broadcast news, and thus an increased political dependency of the mass media. Strömbäck argues that the underlying logic of the postmodern campaign was (news) media logic. Swanson and Mancini (1996) described the postmodern election campaign as a process of *Americanization*, but, as they argue, the process plays out

differently from country to country. It is not a uniform process, yet they found that the overall process of modernization leads to profound changes in the political and national life. Swanson and Mancini identified five key elements of the process of modernization, including the personalization of politics, the scientification of politics, the detachment of parties from citizens, structures of communication increasingly become autonomous, and finally, that citizenship is transformed into a spectatorship.

Permanent campaigning refers to the professionalization of political campaigning and a growing modernization political communication culture which intensified in the late 1970s and early 1980 as a result of the increased pervasiveness of television. Narrowcast television, often combined with targeted television commercials and extensive contextual advertising, contributed to a surge of professional consultants, who were tasked with the mission to control image making and message control, essentially spinning the campaigns in the desired direction through extensive news management. The author Sidney Blumenthal (1980) described the political consultants as “the new power within the American system. They are permanent; the politicians ephemeral. The consultants have supplanted the old party bosses as the link to the voters”. Blumenthal observed that, as a result of the permanent campaign, governing “turned into a perpetual campaign”, in which government became instrumental in sustaining elected official’s popularity. Blumenthal concluded that permanent campaigning was a misguided attempt to restore “the legitimacy of the state by maintaining the credibility of politicians. Credibility is verified by winning, staying in power. And legitimacy is confused with popularity”. Perhaps more importantly and worrisome, permanent campaigning erodes the differences between governing and campaigning. While electioneering is all about winning, government and parliamentary democracy is usually thought of in its ideal form as a collaborative effort, which rests on deliberative reasoning and rationality intended to benefit the greater good, not partisanship. Hugh Heclo (2000) observed that if “campaigning and governing are merging into one indiscriminate mass, we would do well to ask whether that means something important is happening”. In studying traces of permanent campaigning in Norway and Sweden, Anders O. Larsson (2016) referred to permanent campaigning as “blurred lines between campaigning and governing”, where “the “always-on” logic of social media has led to suggestions that such continuous endeavors by politicians might be on the rise”. Yet, Larsson’s study came up with mixed results of constant permanent campaigning. Rather than interpreting this as an absence of permanent campaigning, it could be understood as a reconfiguration of the permanent campaign. Elmer, Langlois, and McKelvey (2012) suggest that because of the use of social media

platforms in election campaigns, entire media systems have shifted away from the 24/7 news cycle that dominated the mass media's broadcast news, to a networked permanent campaign which "conforms more to a responsive political process – an immanent space of reactions to political events". Elmer, Langlois, and McKelvey argue that the "predominance of a handful of social media platforms, presents us with a new context of *mediatization*, one marked by the challenge of managing an ever-expanding field of communication in order to ensure the coherence, cohesiveness, and in everyday terms, *visibility* of political campaigns". Adding to the complexity, in recent campaigns, e.g. in the 2012 and 2016 presidential election campaigns in the United States (Kreiss, 2016; Kreiss & McGregor, 2018), consultants from major social media platforms and search engines have been working with campaigns on either side. While it seems like an obvious choice, since it could contribute to increased visibility and more flexible responsiveness during election campaigns, it also increases the campaigns dependency on social media platforms and their logic, and as such, this only leads to increased mediatization.

According Michael Margolis and David Resnick (2000), who coined the *Cyberspace Revolution*, the "first significant campaigning on the Web" became a reality with the 1996 national election in the United States. The major candidates were running websites, and the Republican and Democratic parties along with minor parties were on the Web too. The Internet peaked on election day, and, according to Margolis and Resnick, when people went online in massive numbers for election results, this caused traffic jams on the Web. Although the 1996 campaigns' websites broke new political ground, the 2000 national election campaigns of George Bush and Al Gore, despite their more technical sophistication and the different communication objectives, kept their online campaigning separate from the rest of the campaigns. The main purpose of the campaigns' online presence was to "recruit interested supporters on the basis of information-intensive communication" (Bimber, 2003: 187). Chadwick refers to the 1996 and 2000 national elections as *false starts* in terms of Internet campaigning, and despite innovative trends, Chadwick concluded that the campaigns were "televised politics as usual" (2006: 155). With a decline in political participation and dissatisfaction with the professionalized media-driven forms of campaigning as a backdrop, the 2004 election marked the first real Internet campaigns in the United States. According to Chadwick, it was Howard Dean's campaign used of the Internet for information sharing and blogging, the Dean campaign successfully drove online microdonations to a new level, and used meetup.com for organizing the campaign, its events and rallies where the campaign included external bloggers with the same credentials as journalists (2006: 163). Eventually the

Dean campaign failed to compete with the other campaigns, including Kerry's, and Hindman (2009: 37) argues that the "Dean campaign marked the end of the beginning for Internet politics, the moment when the medium impacted traditional concerns like campaign fundraising and mobilization". If the election in 2004 was the end of the beginning, including the end of the postmodern campaigns, the Obama campaign in 2008 was a new turning point in campaigning. Daniels Kreiss (2016: 3f) argued that "contemporary campaigning has entered a new technology-intensive era where parties and campaigns have invested considerable resources in technology, digital media, data, and analytics to not only keep pace with these changes, but also actively shape technological contexts and define what twenty-first-century citizenship looks like". Similarly, Magin, Podschuweit, Haßler, and Russmann (2017) argue for a redefinition of the three-phase model, which would also include more and different ideal types of campaigning, i.e. partisan-, mass-, target group and individual-centered campaigns. Owen (2014) refers to the transition as the switch towards "new media, new politics 2.0", which is based on a three stage typology digital media.

Years	Internet Technologies	Media and Politics	Media Logic
1992 – 1995	Brochureware Websites	Old Media, New Politics	Mass Media Logic
1996 – 2007	Interactive Websites and Blogs	New Media, New Politics 1.0	Network Logic
2008 –	Social Media Platforms	New Media, New Politics 2.0	Social Media Logic

*New media and Political Campaigns, based on the typology by Owen (2014).*

### The Postdigital Campaign

The election campaigns following Barack Obama win in 2008, which I sometimes refer to as *postdigital* campaigns<sup>1</sup>, were inspired by the evolution of the Obama campaigns use of digital communication and social media platforms, like Facebook and YouTube, which included the facilitation of

<sup>1</sup> In Robert Pepperell and Michael Punt's book *The Postdigital Membrane* (2000), the authors use the term the postdigital age. Here the term postdigital is "intended to acknowledge the current state of technology whilst rejecting the implied conceptual shift of the 'digital revolution'". Another, but similar, take on the postdigital is offered by Contreras-Koterbay and Mirocha (2016: 39), who argue that the postdigital characterize the "new economic, social and cultural contexts that have been introduced in the last decade due to the general evolution of computational technologies towards even more autonomous systems, ubiquitous devices, real-time and cloud-based software and services". As such, they argue that the postdigital is not a new temporal period that comes after the 'digital', but the phase that came right after the 'digital revolution'.

networking, online collaboration, community building, as well as the continuous laddering of active engagement. But the campaigns have also been very innovative, adding new digital forms to campaigning, including search engine optimization, often combined with political advertisement on various websites, including news media websites, along with new forms of microtargeting and remarketing. Indeed, apart from using social media platforms in election campaigns, candidates and parties seem to have tried everything digital, from advanced websites (Havenstein, 2008), crowdspeaking (Wardle, 2014), mobile game and entertainment apps (Gómez-García et al., 2019), to WIFI targeting, i.e. using WIFI router names for campaign purposes (Heyden, 2012; Maffei, 2017). But once opponents see the positive effects of campaign innovation, they counter this by applying the same or similar practices. As Norris observed (2000: 177), when the major parties professionalize their campaign communications, then “developments in one party are likely to be neutralized as others adopt similar strategies”. Similarly, Daniel Kreiss (2016: 17) has observed that “campaigns mimetically borrow innovative elements from one another during cycles all the time”. Adding to this, as Sasha Issenberg (2012) has noted, then every time “a fresh communication technology has become available, those who practice politics have been quick to announce that elections would be remade in its image”. Those observations should give pause to four considerations. First, in order to neutralize new campaign features, the opponents must adapt to new practices and scale up on their own operations. Second, effects experienced following implementation of a new campaign feature may be lessened or completely cancelled out when opponents implement corresponding features. What may seem fresh or spectacular and generator attention during one election campaign, and thus have some effect, may seem stale and outdated at the next election. And as such, it should serve as a constant reminder that things change. The third point is that campaigns must be able to increase knowledge intensive practices within a short span of time, which often requires external assistance such as consultants (Kreiss, 2016). While these evolutionary and innovative practices may have been common in American campaigns for decades, political parties in other countries have gradually adopted what is known as the *shopping model*. Strömbäck and Kioussis (2014) have observed that parties now shop for “those campaign practices that work best and are most appropriate in a particular context. This leads to a process of professionalization of political campaigning outside of the United States. The end result is hybridization”. Finally, Römmele and von Scheidmesser (2016) have observed that campaigning have entered a fourth phase, where the mechanics of the campaigns have changed because of new media technologies and new media practises, in which politics becomes more personalized, more professionalized, with increased use of consultants, and,

in context of the hybrid media system, campaigns become mediatized. In the mediatized campaign, Römmele and von Scheidmesser argue that “campaigning *is* doing politics”.

The defining characteristics of the postdigital campaigns are that they have become increasingly personalized and emotional, campaigns invite citizen participation and offer access to candidates, and then campaigning is data driven. Campaigns are still planned and coordinated nationally, but often they require external operations run by consultants or communication agencies. Like the long durations in the age of modern campaigns (Norris, 2000: 144), postdigital campaigns need long time before the short campaign to build reach, i.e. get followers, and engage with voters on social media platforms. Campaigns increasingly use special party campaign units, external professional campaign consultants or platform consultants for frequent opinion polling, focus group interviews, digital and social media analytics or advertising split testing. Campaigns frequently live stream commentary and event reporting on social media platforms, and they have also increased their presence on social media platforms aim for media multiplex engagements with voters. Campaigns expand their news management to include news media monitoring, and campaigns seek to deliver rapid response to news media stories or media events across all media channels, but often first on social media platforms like Twitter. Campaigns have higher costs for professional consultants and technology intensive campaigns, which often require production crews for short durations depending on scheduled events. Campaigns also spend more money targeting individual voters and clusters of voters, e.g., grouped on location and interests, on social media platforms to counter social and partisan dealignment. The dominating media logics are social media logic, network media logic, and hybrid media logic. The new dimension of the postdigital does not imply the displacement of previous campaign forms or the practises associated with them, though some may have disappeared. Often, political candidates will perform the practises of previous forms of campaigning for traditional reasons and normative assessments of how politician is supposed to act, or in other words: Politicians have to perform the part as a politician.

### **Social Media in Campaigning and Electioneering**

While Obama’s election campaign of 2008 was the model playbook for the campaigns that followed, for researchers it is a reference point, which can be understood as a catalogue of the modern hybrid postdigital election campaigns. The Obama campaign employed a multitude of novel and innovative strategies and tactics, from voter engagement, voter mobilization, such as the *Get Out the Vote* campaigns, information dissemination, including online advertising, increased personalization, and campaign organization on



digital and social media platforms. It coincided in with the rise of social media, with Facebook and Twitter, and technological evolution and convergence, including on mobile devices, e.g., gadgets like the iPhone and tablets.

Although mediated online interaction is not device centric, the evolution of digital campaigns has depended on hardware, e.g. desktop computers, laptops, mobile devices, like tablets and smartphones, but also sound and video production equipment, as much as the social media platforms and the affordances the platforms offer users. Elihu Katz (2014: 456) argues that mass media, or the *living-room media* as he calls them, “isolate people in domesticity”, whereas mobile social media “create networks of actual companionship”, and, Katz adds, that the “networks of companionship “have cut themselves free, at least ostensibly, from control by establishments”. Similarly, in updating his theory on mediated communication, Thompson (2020) argued that in the new form of communication, “it is not the device that matters here, it is the form of interaction that is created by computer-mediated communication”, yet he continues that “the smartphone is a computer too”, and it is “in some ways even more important for understanding the new forms of interaction that are brought into being by computer mediated communication and their increasingly pervasive presence in everyday life. In the mid-2000s, massive growth in the use of smartphones was evolutionary for digital campaigning, since it coincided with the increased use of social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, where users were enabled to consume political information on news media and on social media platforms, engage with political campaigns, or participate in political debates. Peter Brandtzæg (2010) observed that rapid changes in information and media systems lead to a convergence of different technologies, and noted that it had become possible to “use a mobile telephone to browse the Internet, the Internet to make phone calls, and the television to check emails. This evolving media convergence suggests a common user typology across media platforms”. Smartphones have been instrumental in news production, where journalists are enabled to report from the field and perform live factchecking of political statements, and as such, smartphones are seen to have empowered journalists (Westlund, 2013). In election campaigns, smartphones ads to the pervasiveness of campaigns, because smartphones are always present among voters (Nehren, 2013), who are able to seek political information, consume news, and participate in political debates. Today, all social media platforms offer native applications for smartphones, and many platforms, like Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat, started on mobile devices (Margetts et al., 2015). James Miller (2014) argues that the “ubiquitous smartphone can be understood as both an

indicator of mediatization and as a communications device whose distinctive pattern of affordances and often highly personal practices of usage contribute to its intensification”. For candidates standing in elections, the use of smartphones, to report from the campaign trail or informing voters of live local political events, have become part and parcel of the digital campaign.

European and Nordic researchers have studied different levels of political campaigning on social media platforms, such as elite politicians, the broader field of candidates, and the parties different roles during campaigns, they have explored the presence and use of different social media platforms, though the main focus has been on Twitter and Facebook, and they have examined different types of elections, e.g. national general elections, and second order elections like the elections for European Parliament and local elections. In the national elections, the long campaign usually last for little more than a year for most candidates (Fridkin et al., 2017), whereas the short campaign runs from the dissolution of Parliament and the election date (In Denmark, the short campaign usually lasts three weeks). For the second order elections, the election dates follow a predetermined cycle. Overall, candidates use social media platforms to share information (Gulati & Williams, 2010), interact with and engage voters (Harris & Harrigan, 2015; Stetka et al., 2019), other politicians, and the news media, create a participatory engagement among voters, and mobilize supporters, through tiny acts of participation, such as online fundraising and micro-donations, but at scale (Margetts et al., 2015), and organize their campaign (Kleis Nielsen, 2012; Nielsen, 2009). The key components of campaigning on social media platforms are presence and visibility, responsiveness, reach, and virality. Campaigns are data-driven, and candidates and parties use different forms of analytical frameworks to assess the campaign efforts and target voters (Hersh, 2015; Simon, 2019; Stieglitz et al., 2018).

In a study of the Dutch election 2010, Spierings and Jacobs (2014) observed that the “eager to use social media, but that relatively few people follow candidates”. At the time, the popular social media platforms were Facebook, Twitter, and the Dutch platform Hyves, which according to Spierings and Jacobs was more popular than Facebook in 2010. 18 parties participated in the election, ten of which passed the threshold of at least 0.67 percent of the votes, equalling one seat, and their study subsequently included 493 candidates of which 57,6 percent were present on either Twitter or Hyves. Among Spierings and Jacobs’ results were that the *list-pullers*, i.e., the first name on the ballot for each party, and thus the party leader, attracted most voters. Among the rest of the candidate field, position on the list, incumbency, and gender as well as name recognition (in the news media) were important for effects in preferential voting. Controlling for these showed that presence

on social media, the amounts of followers, and the active use of social media all influenced voting. Spierings and Jacobs results suggest that there is a relation between elite politicians, e.g., party leaders and incumbent politicians, and voting effects, compared to lesser known candidates.

For most candidates, their political position, track record, local linkage, and personal characteristics are important knowledge for many voters and their trust in candidates. Trust is a fundamental component in representative democracy, that voters entrust the candidate of their choice with their power to make political decisions on their behalf. Politicians depend on the trust of the voters, and without trust, politicians lose legitimacy. In this sense, the transfer of power from the voter to the political candidate is a complicated, personal affair, in which the politicians' identity and authenticity are based on evaluations of personal traits, such as sincerity, integrity, and likeability, but not only, since politicians have to be aligned with voters on issues and policies. It is then for good reasons, that politicians make an effort to meet the voters and listen to their constituencies face-to-face, but also appear to preserve these characteristics in mediated campaigns, on television, radio broadcast, newspapers. And then on social media platforms, where, as Gunn Enli (2015) has observed, "the distinction between offline and online communication has become increasingly blurred, but is still complex". People do not think of identity as separate between online and offline. Here Enli notes that unlike face-to-face communication, "digital mediated communication is seemingly more dependent on authenticity illusions and a negotiated authenticity contract". According to Gilpin, Palazzolo, and Brody (2010), trust in the personal campaign is based on perceived authority, which is based on expertise and credibility, identity, which is defined along a continuum where "authentic identities are perceived as reliable and genuine, while less authentic identities are unreliable or generic", transparency, meaning that communication is open to scrutiny, engagement, which rests on the interaction between community members and the organization.

While the previous description may fit most candidates, there are other types of candidates, that voters may know about, either from traditional mass media or from social media. These types of candidates are the celebrity politician, the populist leader, and the hyperleader. The celebrity politician is closely related to the culture of mass media society, and they often have a background in popular culture, cinema or television. In studying celebrity politicians, John Street (2004) observed three types of celebrity politicians. The first type is that of an elected politician or candidate, whose background is in entertainment, show business or sport, and who trades on this background in the attempt to get elected. The second type is an elected politician or candidate, who uses the forms and associations of the celebrity to enhance

their image and communicate their message. The third type is the entertainer, who is vocal on politics and claims the right to represent peoples and causes, but who does so without seeking or acquiring elected office. One of John Street's (2004: 436) observations about celebrity politics is that when politicians play into popular culture, it is a "cynical expression of a desperate populism, one in which presentation and appearance substitute for policy and principle". Continuing Street's studies of celebrity politics, Marsh, Hart, and Tindall (2010) explored the visibly intersection of the mass media, the entertainment industry, and politics, and expanded the typology of celebrity politicians to five, as seen below.

	Celebrity advocate	Celebrity activist/endorser	Celebrity politician	Politician celebrity	Politician who uses others' celebrity
Conventional sphere / sphere of origin	Celebrity	Celebrity	Celebrity	Political	Political
Nature of the relationship with other sphere	Political agenda-setting and/or policy-seeking behaviour by high visibility figures from traditionally non-political spheres (entertainment, arts, sports, civil society, journalism and science)	High-visibility figures from traditionally non-political spheres offering financial and/or public support for a specific political candidate and/or party	Legislative or executive offices sought by high-visibility figures from traditionally non-political spheres	Office holder whose public behaviour, private life or association with celebrities alters his own public persona beyond the traditional political sphere into the celebrity sphere (by intent or by accident/scandal)	Office holder who uses specific celebrities and others' fame to endorse their own candidature, party or policies

*Operators on the Celebrity – Politics Interface: A Typology (Marsh et al., 2010: 327)*

The second type of politicians that has become very visible along with the rise of social media platforms are populist politicians, both to the left and right. Left-wing populists are often understood as a reaction to wealthy economic elites in capitalist societies, whereas right-wing populism is a reaction of the people against the political elite. Although mainstream research into populism as a right-wing ideology, Husted and Bossetta (2017) have summarized four distinct research avenues into populism. First, populism as a thin ideology, in which society split between the people and the (corrupt) elite. Second, populism is viewed as a form of political

representation that includes the discursive content, which often appeals to the people, and is accompanied by performative elements. The third view is that of populism as a right-wing movement, which represents the people and rejects political pluralism and populism as a logic. Finally, populism is viewed as a logic of articulation that unifies political identities, sometimes against a common adversary, e.g., the elite or the establishment.

In many European countries, the current populist movements are right-wing populists, which according to Cas Mudde (2017), is close to the mainstream populist *Zeitgeist*. To understand the depth of right-wing populism, Ralph Schroeder (2017) argues that “one step must be to acknowledge that populist ideas are for the most part the expression of genuine discontent – not the irrational emotions of people who have been misled”, and, Schroeder adds, “any explanation of populism must focus on politics”. Schroeder argues that the digital media is “a necessary precondition for the success” of populists, since populist messages are considered unsuitable for mainstream media, it can only “be expressed online”. Nevertheless, Schroeder asserts that “neither new media technology nor the rise and strengthening of populism alone explain the change in the political landscape; combined, they do”. Similarly, in a recent study of how populist politicians spread a fragmented ideology, Engesser, Ernst, Esser, and Büchel (2017) argued that while “all media establish a connection to the people, social media provide the populists with a much more direct linkage”.

Closely related to both the populist and celebrity politicians, we find the third type of politician, which Paolo Gerbaudo (2019a) calls the hyperleader. The hyperleader is a “charismatic, mediatised and celebrity-culture informed leader”, who is often also the founder of the platform party and is widely seen as “the ultimate guarantor of the party and its founding principles” (2019b). According to Gerbaudo, platform parties are presented as “radically democratic parties that want to give citizens a direct say on collective decisions, thus eliminating forms of mediation suspected of distorting the democratic process”. Sometimes Gerbaudo refers to the platform party as the digital party, since it mimics the logic of online platforms into its decision-making processes, where members, the highly active superbase, can participate in the day-to-day conversations on social media or Internet platforms. While hyperleaders “float above the party”, Gerbaudo has observed that they “may have a far larger social media base than their organisation”, and as such, the hyperleader becomes central for the party’s mediation of party information and politics. The popularity of the hyperleader is important, in a time, as Gerbaudo (2019c) argues, when “political influence is now measured in part through social media metrics: likes, followers, and shares”.

Political leaders and prominent candidates can elevate their campaigns on social media platforms through their personal presence and visibility are presence on platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube, but this requires responsiveness, reach, and virality. In order to engage voters on social media platforms, political actors need to be able to respond quickly and consistently to users, events, and issues, but they also need reach, i.e. the size of their followership on social media platforms, and be able to communicate in a manner that can make the message diffusion go viral, or as Klinger and Svensson (2015: 1248) argue, “distribution on social media platforms is built on the logic of virality”. Though it is a compelling thought, reach and virality are often interesting metrics, but they should not be confused with voting appeal. Reach and virality are two closely related concepts in campaigning, which are important facets of social media logic, as well as networked media logic, and ultimately for hybrid intermedia agenda-setting. Hemsley and Mason (2012) define virality as a word-of-mouth “diffusion process wherein a message is actively forwarded from person to person, within and between multiple weakly linked personal networks, and marked by a period of geometric growth in the number of people who are exposed to the message”. Often the messages are constructed as either *memes* or *virals* to increase visibility and reach.

The concept of the meme originates from Richard Dawkins<sup>2</sup> elaborations on genes and human culture, but as an Internet concept, Knobel and Lankshear (2007: 199) describe memes as “contagious patterns of “cultural information” that get passed from mind to mind and directly generate and shape the mindsets and significant forms of behavior and actions of a social group”. Similarly, Limor Shifman (2013: 41) defines an Internet meme as “(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and transformed via the internet by multiple users.” But Shifman also makes a distinction between memes and virals, where the concept of virals is defined as being comprised of “a *single cultural unit* that propagates in many copies”. To achieve virality in electioneering, campaigns often seek to distribute highly political virals, e.g., campaign videos, or memetic content, e.g., ranging from visual content, photographs, to cartoons

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<sup>2</sup>In his book, *The Selfish Gene*, science professor Richard Dawkins (1976: 241) discussed the replication of human genes and human culture, and wrote that the “new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. ‘Mimeme’ comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like ‘gene’. I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme\* If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to ‘memory’, or to the French word meme. It should be pronounced to rhyme with ‘cream’.”

and image macros. Sometimes parties will try to harness the power of memetic content by making meme generators available to its supporter and the public.

### **Campaigns and Agenda-Setting**

Today the use of social media plays an increasing role in the agenda-setting process, where politicians and parties can control the message content, in organic posts and paid advertising on social media platforms, without the interference of news mass media, thus strategic communication on social media can increase the potential agenda-setting effect on the public agenda but also substantially influence the media agenda. McCombs (2014) argues that although “the ultimate goal of any political campaign is to win on election day, campaigns increasingly see the immediate purpose as capturing the media agenda”, and then McCombs adds the observation, that vast “amounts of money are spent on political advertising in the mass media, predominantly television in many countries, but increasingly on social media channels as well. These messages convey exactly the agenda decided by the campaign”. It is not just advertising that are increasing on social media. The campaigns’ use of social media platforms points towards the political actors’ possibilities to extend their campaigns. In a study of the candidates use of Facebook and Twitter in the German federal election campaign of 2013, Stier, Bleier, Lietz, and Strohmaier (2018) found that the candidates’ campaigning complemented “the “masspersonal” communication in the quasi-public sphere of Twitter with the more direct communication practices on Facebook for organizational and mobilization purposes”. And while politicians used the agenda-setting functions of social media platforms and their influence on the public agenda, the researchers found that “politicians and their audiences discuss different topics on social media than those salient among a mass audience”, but also that the salient topics on social media aligned remarkably between the candidates and the audiences.

Another way of influencing the media agenda is through intermedia agenda-setting, and in this respect party news media and partisan news media play an increasing role in elections. In recent American elections, partisan media on the right, e.g. Breitbart and other Alt-Right media, have been important in driving intermedia agenda-setting (Benkler et al., 2018). In recent studies of hyperpartisan news media on Facebook during the 2017 elections in Norway, Kalsnes and Larsson (2019) found that even if hyperpartisan did not compete with legacy news media in terms of traffic, hyperpartisan news media were nevertheless able to “gain visibility during the studied election”. In a similar study of the Swedish national elections in 2018, Larsson (2019) suggests that right-wing and hyperpartisan actors “are also savvy exploiters of the various algorithms and logics that guide and explain visibility on platforms”. Adding

to this finding, Larsson’s study shows that by utilizing “emotional and sometimes aggressive styles, right-wing actors succeed in gaining user engagement by means of hate speech and the purveying of fake news”. In a study of how the news media and journalists used Twitter as a source for coverage in the British and Dutch elections in 2010, Broersma and Graham (2012) observed that Twitter had become a convenient tool for journalists who could use direct quotes from the tweets of the candidates in their news stories. It is no surprise that political actors include dual screening in strategies. In a study of the 2014 Belgium election campaign, Harder, Sevenans, and Van Aelst (Harder et al., 2017) have observed that intermedia agenda-setting, understood as two-way agenda-setting effects between traditional news media and digital and social media, has become increasingly important in election campaigns, where “institutionally powerful actors — politicians and parties — exert relatively much influence on the media coverage, which is in line with the universal “power elite” news value”. In their study, Harder, Sevenans, and Van Aelst found that on Twitter the “role of “other” actors’ tweets [...] is overshadowed by that of media and political accounts”. The two-way agenda-setting is frequently observed during major televised media events, like party leader debates or party presentations, in elections campaigns. In a study linking the images of the first screen, television, to the commentary on the second screen, Twitter, during the first debate between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in the presidential election campaign in 2012, Shah et al. (2015) explored the relationship between the debate on television and on Twitter. Among their findings were, first, that the public on Twitter “primarily responds to the visual elements of candidate behavior, including facial displays and expressive gestures, and secondarily to verbal elements, particularly candidate memes or memorable utterances”<sup>3</sup>. Second, that sentiments expressed by Twitter users showed that “the debate is not purely under the candidate’s control but often a function of what the opponent is saying and doing”. Following the broadcasts of the party leaders’ debates during the 2014 European Parliament elections in the United Kingdom, Vaccari, Chadwick, and O’Loughlin found that dual screening, which they defined as a “the bundle of practices that involve integrating, and switching across and between, live broadcast media and social media”, had become a growing and popular part of many citizens routine “during important political media events”, which led to an evolving engagement with

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<sup>3</sup> Shah et al. (2015) discuss the “most powerful ... verbal elements as memes”. Memes are here defined as “pithy expressions that are easily repeated or referenced on a short messaging platform such as Twitter”, which is different from Shifman’s (2013: 41) definition of Internet memes, as: “(a) group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users”.



politics. They observed that political commentary was not just reserved for politicians, campaign elites, and professional journalists, although they still exercised “significant power, their behavior must now be situated in the context of actors who interface with news-making assemblages as they unfold in real time, using older and newer media logics”. Similarly, in a study of American’s use of second screening in hybrid media environments, Barnidge, Zúñiga, and Diehl (2017), who refer to second screening as a concept which is “comprised of two complementary and related dimensions — information seeking and discussion”, argued that “people can be more engaged with public conversations about politics—conversations that are characterized by a mixture of news, user-generated content, and social opinion cues”. One of the results of their study was, that they found that there were “good reasons to believe that the hybrid media experience is even more influential than the traditional media environment in terms of making people open to political persuasion”. Secondly, they found that “people who frequently use social media for news are more likely to be open to persuasion in social media contexts than those who do not”. In a study of agenda setting during mediated events, in this case the issue salience on Twitter throughout televised debates between the party leaders in the Swedish general election of 2014, Sandberg, Bjereld, Bunyik, Forsberg and Johansson (2019) found that generally, the agenda on Twitter follows the agenda of mass news media, but also that “Twitter appears to be enhancing the salience of the issues highlighted during mediated political events”. Thus, the researchers found that social media has a “distinctive mass communication mode that is intertwined with the mainstream media”, but also that, during mediated events, the agenda on Twitter is strongly influenced by the agenda of mainstream media, including “what, when and how political issues are addressed”.

### **Propaganda and Digital Astroturfing**

Closely related to the notions of hyperpartisan news, agenda-setting in election campaigns, and the formation of public opinion is the concept of propaganda. Walter Lippmann ([1922] 2015: 18) described propaganda as carried out by “men, who can prevent independent access to the event, arrange the news to suit their purpose”, thus propaganda was conditioned on the exercise of censorship and the construction of news to influence public opinion. Similar notions are present in Harold D. Lasswell’s early work on propaganda, in which he defined propaganda as “the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols” (1927: 627). Referring to Lippmann’s ([1922] 2015) understanding of how peoples’ imagination shaped their actions, Edward L. Bernays’ (1928: 25) defined modern propaganda as “a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group”.

Bernays argued that whether propaganda was good or bad depended “upon the merit of the cause and the correctness of the information published” (1928: 20). Like Bernays, Jacques Ellul thought that correctness was an important component of propaganda. “Lying must be avoided”, he wrote (1973: 53), and then added Lenin’s proclamation: “In propaganda, the truth pays off”. Ellul (1973: 61) defined propaganda as

a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its action of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization.

The use of propaganda to subvert or manipulate political debates in election campaigns are well established, and takes the form of misinformation, fake news, or false amplification. Computational propaganda is often referred to as CyberTurfing or digital astroturfing. Leiser (2016) defines CyberTurfing as the “practice by state actors and commercial entities using digitally mediated platforms to facilitate a commercial benefit or to advance a political objective”, whereas Zhang, Carpenter, and Ko (2013) define online astroturfing as “as the dissemination of deceptive opinions by imposters posing as autonomous individuals on the Internet with the intent of promoting a specific agenda”. In their informative typology of astroturfing, Kovic, Rauchfleisch, and Sele (Kovic et al., 2016) observed that *sock puppets*, *click farms*, *sympathizers*, and *paid supporters* were engaged in the clandestine performative repertoires of astroturfing to manipulate or persuade either the public or political actors. In 2018 Kovic, Rauchfleisch, Sele, and Caspar (2018) defined digital astroturfing as “a form of manufactured, deceptive and strategic top-down activity on the Internet initiated by political actors that mimics bottom-up activity by autonomous individuals”.

In 2016, the Russian Internet Research Agency, IRA, interfered with the American presidential election campaign, using Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. On Facebook and Instagram, the agency posted content and ran live ads, on Twitter, the agency employed trolls and ran bots too. But it did not begin there. According to *Computational Propaganda Research Project* at Oxford University, the Internet Research Agency was actively engaged in American politics on digital and social media platforms at least since 2012 (Howard et al., 2018). In terms of volume and effect, the results may have been meagre, but the Russian interference had a tremendous impact on the media agenda and the political agenda, thus achieving a (long-term) state of uncertainty and destabilization. It was, however, not only foreign interference that influenced the American election in 2016. In an investigation of the use of bots in the campaign, Woolley and Guilbeault (2017) observed that while

Donald Trump was mentioned far more than Hillary Clinton, the main purpose of the bots seemed to be pledges of “uncritical allegiance to dominant candidates”, thus trying to establish a “manufactured consensus” — or as Woolley and Guilbeault put it, that the use of bots in should create “the illusion of popularity for a candidate who might otherwise be on the political fringes”. The election campaign was also influenced by manipulation of and by mainstream news media as the result of intermedia agenda-setting by right-wing partisan news media, like Breitbart, the Daily Caller, Judicial Watch, and Fox. In a study of partisanship, propaganda, and disinformation, Faris et al (2017)<sup>4</sup> manipulation was not a result so much because of the spread of fake news or of the fragmentation of public discourse on social media, but more because the “political media as an ecosystem, in which apparently small actors can have a powerful influence through synergistic or parasitic relationships with other actors”.

In a study of the rise of the German party, *Alternative für Deutschland*, in the national election in 2017, Serrano, Shahrazaye, Papakyriakopoulos, and Hegelich (2019) argue that social media platforms gave “populist actors freedom to articulate their ideology and spread their message”, *Alternative für Deutschland* assumed the role in populist movements as the people’s voice, facilitating “an anti-establishment ideology common to populist parties”, and that social media without gatekeepers failed to fact-check the information, allowing populists access to “a fertile space to spread their rhetoric”. They observed that the *Alternative für Deutschland* relied on alternative media and high online activity, and online manipulation. Though it was not possible to trace and link bots on Facebook and Twitter directly to *Alternative für Deutschland*, the party enjoyed the support of very active social bots on Facebook and Twitter, but also found support in two online communities<sup>5</sup>, which “had the explicit goal of trolling<sup>6</sup> social media in support of the party. In studies of the 2018 general election and 2019 election

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<sup>4</sup> For an extensive scrutiny of the relationship between legacy news media and the right-wing partisan media, see Benkler, Faris, and Hall’s (2018) book *Network Propaganda, Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*.

<sup>5</sup> The communities mentioned were *Infokrieg* and *Reconquista Germania*.

<sup>6</sup> Claire Hardaker’s (2010) definition of the term “troll”: “A troller is a CMC user who constructs the identity of sincerely wishing to be part of the group in question, including professing, or conveying pseudo-sincere intentions, but whose real intention(s) is/are to cause disruption and/or to trigger or exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement”. For an in depth look into Russian trolling, troll armies and trolls, Jessica Aro (2016) has written a highly informative article called *The Cyberspace War: Propaganda and Trolling as Warfare Tools*.

for the European Parliament in Italy, Giglietto, Righetti, Marino (2019) found coordinated inauthentic behaviour in sharing links, false content, or fake news on Facebook Pages. Some of the registered inauthentic behaviour were non-political, but a substantial part mentioned right-wing politicians, mainly Matteo Salvini and parties, League (Lega), and attacked the opponents of certain those right-wing anti-immigration policies, including the Pope.<sup>7</sup>

### Going Negative

Negative campaigning is as old as campaigning itself. As part of the instructions on *How to Win an Election*, Quintus Tullius Cicero told his brother Marcus, that he had to put on a good show for the Romans and then added that it would not hurt him to remind them “of what scoundrels your opponents are and to smear these men at every opportunity with the crimes, sexual scandals, and corruption they have brought on themselves” (Cicero, 2012: 79). Research in negative campaigning experienced a revival in the 1980s (Lau et al., 2007), with the rise of the post-modern campaigns along with permanent campaigning, changing practises of the mass media’s news norms and values, routine politics, and professional consultants. The pinnacle of negative campaigning was the 2016 presidential election in the United States, where the republican contender, Donald Trump, relentlessly attacked everyone who opposed him during the Republican Party primaries, and they him. In the presidential race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, the media sphere on the centre and left “paid attention almost exclusively to negative articles focused on personal scandals or failings” of Clinton and Trump, but although the level of attention to (and criticism of) Trump was several times higher<sup>8</sup>. On the right side of the media sphere, the Trump campaign worked closely with Breitbart and Fox, in attacking Clinton’s character while pushing Trump’s positive characteristics as well as the issues on Trump’s political agenda (Faris et al., 2017)<sup>9</sup>. Some media pundits argued that Trump and his campaign broke the limits for the policies politicians will promote and not hurt their electoral chances, also known as the Overton window, in a manner never seen before. Pundit David French was quoted in *The Christian Science Monitor* for writing: “On key issues, he didn’t just move the Overton window, he smashed it, scattered the shards, and rolled over them with a steamroller” (McCutcheon, 2016).

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<sup>7</sup> I would like to include some of the cases from Woolly and Howard’s *Computational Propaganda* here!

<sup>8</sup> In February 2016, during the Republican primaries, CBS Chief Executive Officer Leslie Moonves described the campaign as a “circus”, and then famously said characterized Donald Trump’s presidential run: “It may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for CBS” (Collins, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> For more extensive works on Donald Trump and the media, see Benkler, Faris, and Roberts (2018) *Network Propaganda*, and Papacharissi and Boczkowski’s (2018) *Trump and the Media*.

Lau and Pomper (2004: 4) define negative campaigning as simply “talking about the opponent – criticizing his or her programs, accomplishments, qualifications, and so on”. Candidates and parties will use negative campaigning during an election campaign to attack opponents’ attributes, i.e. their character, their issues and ideology, or actions in their course of the campaign. While most scholars subscribe to the attack premise of negative campaigning, some argue that the simple dichotomy could allow for more nuanced perceptions of the findings, including different levels of criticism (Haselmayer, 2019). Negative campaigning has been closely linked to agenda-setting and the news media’s campaign coverage, or as Lau (1985: 136) describes the “important” role of the news media, as “the conduit of most political information to the public”. Iyengar, Norpoth, and Hahn (2004) have argued that the recent emergence of the horserace as the dominant story in media campaign coverage marks a shift towards the narrative of the strategic game of campaigns rather than reports on the candidates’ positions on the issues and matters of governance. Based on their findings, horserace news “is widely available for the simple reason that it attracts readers and viewers”. Thus, it is not surprising, that campaigns have sought to influence the media agenda and public opinion with fast and brief messages that accommodate the news media selection criteria. This includes negatively framed, conflictual advertisements and messages, often with a dramatic focus on the opposing candidates’ character, which will make the negative messages newsworthy. Geer (2012) suggests that negative campaign advertisements are one way to explain the rise in negativity. According to Geer “the news media now cover negative ads so extensively that they have given candidates and their consultants extra incentive to produce and air them”. Yet, despite the extensive attention, the effects of negative campaigning are highly contested. Voter turnout seem to decline as a result of negative attacks in television advertisements (Ansolabehere et al., 1994), very little evidence has supported the claim that electoral gains in terms of vote choice can be made from negative campaigning (Lau et al., 2007), and as for the perceptions of democracy, Brooks and Geer (2007) found that uncivil attacks were not perceived by the public as problematic as long as the messages were of substantive content. However, when attacks got personal, uncivil messages were seen to be “significantly less valuable than alternative forms of communication”. In terms of long effects, Brooks and Geer did not find evidence that even very negative campaign messages, including tone, civility, and message focus on issue or trait-based, were “harmful to the democratic engagement of the polity”. According to Brooks and Geer, part of the explanation is that democracy rest “on the ability of candidates for office to both promote their own qualifications for office and question those of the opposition”.

Obviously, going negative also takes place on social media. In a study of the candidates use of Twitter in the Republican Party's 2016 primaries, Gross and Johnson (2016) found that tweet negativity, along with a rise in overall activity on Twitter, increased as the campaign progresses. Donald Trump, the front-runner, would send and receive most negative tweets and was "more likely than his opponents to strike out against even those opponents who are polling poorly". Gross and Johnson do, however, find that "candidates overwhelmingly "punch upwards" against those ahead of them in the polls". In a content analysis of the Facebook posts made by Senate candidates in the 2010 mid-term election, Auter and Fine (2016) examined the factors driving candidate negativity on Facebook, and found that "broad theories of campaign strategy apply to social media". Social media platforms allow for "negative messages to be transmitted quickly", but also allow for rapid shifts in campaign strategy as the "dynamics of the race change". Auter and Fine show that "candidates who trail significantly will be more likely to engage in negativity".

### **Advertising**

Political advertising has long been part of political campaigns, though the possibilities vary from country to country, e.g. in the United States it is possible to run political commercials on television, which is not allowed in Denmark. In the age of the postmodern campaigns, one way to bypass the gatekeepers of the news media, was through paid advertising in mass media. In terms of political advertising on social media platforms, the same mechanism is in play: one way to increase the reach on a platform, is through extensive advertising. In the advertising market, Facebook and Google have been the dominating actors, making substantial earnings from political advertising. In the 2016 presidential election in the United States, advertising on television dropped, while digital advertising increased (Kaye, 2017). According to Kreiss and McGregor (2019), candidates rely on Facebook and Google "for their strategic digital communications, and especially paid media". A minor actor the political advertising, Twitter decided to ban political advertising on the platform altogether in the fall of 2019 (Lerman & Ortutay, 2019; Rajan, 2019). Despite the prominence of advertising on research agendas and in news media reporting, we know surprisingly little about the effects and impact of advertising on social media platforms. Research into political advertising on social media platforms has been very limited, mainly because of the lack of transparency. Recently, following the Cambridge Analytica scandal and ahead of the elections for the European Parliament in May 2019 (Allan, 2019; Junius, 2019; Sullivan, 2019),

platforms have increased access to their advertising libraries<sup>10</sup>. Here it is possible to see which candidates and parties who are running ads and the amounts of money they spend, but research into the effects of user tracking and remarketing, advertising on the dark web, or on search engines, like Google and Bing, is still limited.

### **Campaign Effects**

Conventional wisdom as well as growing amounts of research has it, that social media are very important in elections, but also that social media influence how voters are informed about politics and participate in elections. One conception of the influence of social media in elections has been based on models of one-step flow communication, similar to previously applied communication models, like the hypodermic needle theory or the magic bullet theory of communication but fused with the access to big data on voters and social psychology at scale, psychometrics, has made targeted persuasion of voters exposed to political information on social media possible.

Much of the research interest in one-step flow communication can be attributed to the psychographics models marketed by Cambridge Analytica, which in turn based their models on social psychology at scale, psychometrics, and more recent psychological profiling models like the *Big Five* (Digman, 1990) or the studies in psychological predictions based on digital behaviour by Kosinski et al. (M. Kosinski et al., 2013; Michal Kosinski et al., 2014, 2015). Scholars like Hendricks and Vestergaard (2019: 133) argue that if “you are able to influence those processes and associations, affects, and emotions going on in the dark basement of our *psyche*, you can more or less control us”. In a study of psychological targeting ads on social media platforms as an approach to digital mass persuasion, Matz, Kosinski, Navec, and Stillwell (Matz et al., 2017; Youyou et al., 2015) suggested that the “application of psychological targeting makes it possible to influence the behavior of large groups of people by tailoring persuasive appeals to the psychological needs of the target audiences”. In replicating the finding by using the data from that study, Eckles, Gordon, and Johnson (2018) found that the study “provided limited new evidence for the efficacy of psychologically targeted advertising”. One-step flow communication, Big Data, and psychographics were central explanatory concepts for understanding the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, the national election in the United States in 2016. In both cases, the narrative of how Cambridge Analytica was able to manipulate political behaviour by mixing behavioural psychology with big data and targeted engagement on social

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<sup>10</sup>Snapchat launched their ad library in September 2019, ahead of the 2020 election in the United States (Flynn, 2019).

media has been central in the news reporting (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018) and in documentaries, like *The Great Hack* (Noujaim & Amer, 2019) on Netflix. This happened, despite Cambridge Analytica's Head of Product, Matt Oczkowski, in a Google post-election review on C-Span (C-SPAN, 2016) in 2016, stated: "I don't want to break your heart, but we actually didn't do any psychographics for the Trump campaign".

Another theoretical model of communication that has attracted renewed attention with the rise of social media platform is the model of two-step flow communication. The model is based on the investigative questions explored by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955: 32), such as what influenced peoples decision when voting? The primary answer was: "Other People", and other people is a central part of Katz and Lazarsfeld's concept of *opinion leaders*. Katz and Lazarsfeld's basic proposition of opinion leaders and political communication was "that ideas, often, seem to flow *from* radio and print *to* opinion leaders and *from them* to the list active sections of the population". Katz and Lazarsfeld observed that "opinion leaders are not a group set apart, in that opinion leadership is not a trait which some people have and others do not, but rather than opinion leadership is an integral part of the give-and-take of everyday personal relationships". As such, opinion leadership is not a matter of social, economic, or political elites, but rather a matter of vertical social relationships within a group.

In a study of opinion leadership on Facebook, Winter and Neubaum (2016) identified that political interest and personality strength were "significant predictors of perceived Facebook opinion leadership". Winter and Neubaum argued that Katz & Lazarsfeld's model of two-step flow communication and their concept of opinion leaders can be used as a framework "to understand current dynamics of public opinion in social media". In a large scale study based on collection of 113 million Facebook status updates to compare users' political discussion in the 2008 election, Settle, Bond, Coviello, Fariss, Fowler, and Jones (Settle et al., 2016) explored the of the different posting patterns, political engagement, and voter turnout among voters in competitive battleground states and non-competitive states. The study yielded higher results for comments and clicks on the "I voted" button in battleground states, suggesting that political "competition encourages users to post political status updates; users' friends in turn are exposed to the political discussion of their friends, and may be more likely to post political status updates themselves, even if they are not directly exposed to political competition". Another large-scale study exploring the effects of social media platforms is the study of the 61 million person experiment in social influence and political voter mobilization on Facebook during the midterm elections in 2010, by (Bond et al., 2012). Here the researchers found that political mobilization on Facebook



“can have a direct effect on political self-expression, information seeking and real-world voting behaviour, and that messages including cues from an individual’s social network are more effective than information only appeals”.

Political actors dedicate substantial resources to get followers to engage with the content on through likes and comments, and eventually share it to their own networks, and thus to act as opinion leaders social media platforms (Farkas & Schwartz, 2018; Giglietto et al., 2019). But increasingly, campaigns try to tap into the different forms of flow communication by employing paid influencers (Marker, 2019) and buzzers (Perper, 2018) to distribute political content in a propaganda-like fashion among their networks too, even though they may not be engaged in politics otherwise. In the current campaigns for the nomination of the presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in the United States, billionaire candidate Mike Bloomberg has employed a wide range of political operatives as campaign staff (Grim, 2020), but his campaign is also paid users on social media platforms to share memes of Bloomberg while tagging the campaign.

### **Searching for the Digital Campaign in Denmark**

The general election in 2011 was the first Danish election in which a social media platform like Facebook came to play a central role among the candidates and for the parties’ campaigns. Among the candidates, 81 percent had established some sort of presence on Facebook using either personal profiles og pages, and many of the established politicians were already experienced users of the platform. This is not to say that social media platforms had not been part of Danish elections before. Quite the contrary. Danish parties hit the first wave of Internet campaigning in the late 1990s, when all parties established party websites<sup>11</sup>, and as web 1.0 campaigning continued grow in the early 2000s, the Danish parties followed. In the general election in 2005, the parties use of websites had become more sophisticated. Inspired by presidential candidates use of blogs in the election campaign in the United States in 2004, a small group of Danish candidates turned to new social media like blogs (Klastrup & Pedersen, 2005). While researchers from the University of Copenhagen failed to find any substantial effects of this new form of *cyber-campaigning* (Møller Hansen et al., 2006), others regarded the new forms of campaigning on the Internet as a major breakthrough for political communication in Denmark (Redington, 2005). Two years later for

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<sup>11</sup> In 1995, the Liberal Party was the first party among the parties in parliament then to register for a Danish top-level domain, venstre.dk. The Social Democratic Party, the Conservative Party, the Social Liberal Party, the Red-Green Alliance, and the Danish People's Party all registered their respective top-level domains in 1996, while the Socialist People’s Party was the last among the 'old' parties to register in 1997. See also Appendix I: The Danish Parties.

the general election in 2007, most parties and candidates expanded their campaigns from their own domains<sup>12</sup>, e.g., party websites and personal blogs, to new social media platforms, like YouTube, Myspace, and Flickr. Helle Thorning-Schmidt, who had been elected party leader for the Social Democratic Party after the general election in 2005, had constantly been challenging incumbent Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen of the Liberal Party. This included increased campaigning on the Internet, where Thorning-Schmidt was breaking new digital ground with streaming video on *HelleTV*. Rather than using the interactive features of social media, like blogs or YouTube, candidates used them for broadcasting their campaign messages.

In the general election in 2007, all parties, except the Danish People's Party, were active on Facebook. Among the candidates, apart from a few early first movers to Facebook pages (possibly only two?), politicians, who were present on Facebook, used personal profiles to curate content. To many politicians, campaigning on Facebook was a logical next step from blogging, since establishing a presence on the platform was fast and free, and platforms like Facebook came with the infrastructure to reach a large and growing audience. And to some, metrics like friends and likes were adding to the competitiveness of campaigning. But Facebook was also a next step with limitations. Politicians mainly build their presence personal profiles, since creating Facebook Pages did not offer substantial extra affordances. Like profiles, pages had an upper limit of 5.000 followers, and posting to the platform was limited to the text-based status update. Nevertheless, that did not stop party leaders from competing on Facebook, often making unexpected and spectacular moves, moves which in curious ways continues to shape the political communication culture on social media today. One of the prime examples from the election campaign in 2007 was when the prime minister invited his Facebook friends to run with him while he was on the campaign trail. At the time, the prime minister could boast of a posse of 3.500 friends, and the running event made a splash in the print media and on television, thus showing how early use of social media platforms could be used for running hybrid campaigns, which included staged offline events, which then served as mobilizing content to be shared on social media platforms, but also as news-worthy content ready to be picked by the news media. At the time, limited affordances on Facebook meant that Anders Fogh Rasmussen could not share pictures or videos from the running events during the campaign, only text updates. The prime minister had to wait until February 2008, when Facebook made it possible for politicians to use celebrity pages ahead of the

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<sup>12</sup> For a more exhaustive account of the use of social media in the general election in 2007, please see Klastrup's *Brugen af "sociale medier" online i valgkampen 2007* in Hoff, Linaa Jensen, and Klastrup's election report (2008).

2008 election campaigns in the United States. In evaluating the use of social media in the campaign, Danish scholars were bewildered by the parties and candidates use of social media, like Jakob Linaa Jensen<sup>13</sup>, who complained that the parties wanted “streamlined campaigns, where nothing goes wrong and no critical questions are asked” (Devantier, 2007). The lack of dialogue, seemed off at a time when the voters were flocking to sites like Facebook, seeking community and dialogue. In assessing the effects of social media in the general election in 2007, Jens Hoff observed that despite the massive “hype”, social media did not reach a wider public audience during the election campaign (Hoff et al., 2008).

### **Social Media Platforms in the General Elections 2011 to 2019**

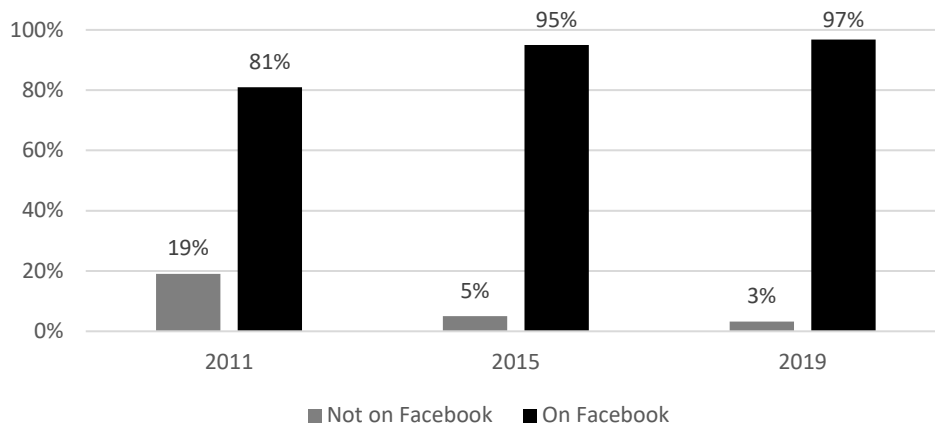
In the past decade, Facebook has increasingly been the social media platform which candidates and parties used in their election campaigns. Ever since the general election in 2011, Facebook has been the default on a national level, but also in local elections in 2013 and 2017 and elections for the European Parliament in 2014 and 2019. On a national level, the first election where Facebook made a difference was the general election in 2011. By then, 81 percent of the candidates were present on Facebook, and a majority of the candidates had established themselves on pages, rather than profiles. That may seem like a high level for the first real use of a social media platform, but the candidates had preparing for a general election since August 2009, when Anders Fogh-Rasmussen (LP) became Secretary General for NATO. But rather than calling an election, Lars Løkke Rasmussen became the party leader of the Liberal Party and, since he had the support among a majority of the parties in parliament, he became Prime Minister too. Adding to this, Facebook had continued its massive growth in Denmark. In 2007, Lisbeth Klastrup (2008: 38) estimated that Facebook had 83.000 users in Denmark. In 2010, Lars Damgaard Nielsen (2010) found that more than 2,2 million Danes were active on the platform. Finally, the success of the Obama campaign in the 2008 presidential election in the United States had not escaped the Danish parties and candidates. As the number of active users continued to surge in Denmark, so did the use among candidates for the general election in 2015, where 95 percent of all candidates had established a presence on the platform. By the general election in 2019, an estimated four million Danes were actively using Facebook, and among the candidates, 97

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<sup>13</sup> The original quote in Danish is: “Partierne vil have strømlinede kampagner, hvor der ikke går noget galt eller stilles kritiske spørgsmål,” siger Jakob Linaa Jensen, adjunkt, Institut for Informations- og Medievidenskab, Aarhus Universitet. “Denne filosofi passer rigtig dårligt sammen med nettets natur, der handler om gensidig dialog”. My translation: “The parties want streamlined campaigns, where nothing goes wrong and no critical questions are asked”, says Jakob Linaa Jensen, assistant professor, Institute for Information and Media Studies, Aarhus University. “This philosophy does not correspond with the nature of the net, which is about mutual dialogue”.

percent were now present on Facebook (the development is displayed in the bar chart below).

In the past three elections, candidate presence has been evenly distributed among candidates from almost all parties. In the past two elections, Liberal Alliance and the Conservative Party had all their candidates present on Facebook. Interestingly, candidates from the Christian Democrats have consistently been below the average for all candidates. In 2015, candidates' presence on Facebook only reached 46 percent. In 2015, it was 79,3 percent, and in 2019, it was 87,5 percent.



#### *Candidates on Facebook, 2011 – 2019*

Facebook has been the dominating social media platform for candidates in the past three general elections. In 2011, eighty-one percent of the candidates used the platform. In the 2015 general election, ninety-five percent used the platform, and in the general election of 2019, ninety-eight percent of the candidates used it. Some of the candidates from Danish Peoples' Party have been slow in adopting a presence on Facebook. In 2011, 69,6 percent of the party's candidates were present on Facebook, but in the general elections in 2015 and in 2019, the party's candidates almost reached the average for all parties. What is remarkable is that there a small group of candidates, who consistently have refrained from using the platform. A similar development, but perhaps with less reluctance, was visible for Red Green Alliance in 2011, where the party had 71,7 percent present on Facebook, and partially in 2015, where the party had 89,90 percent present. In 2019, the party's candidates' presence on Facebook were equal to candidates from other parties.

One explanation for the difference between the candidates' presence on Facebook could be that there exist different communication cultures in the individual parties. For candidates in parties with a presence on or above the average, it seems that the parties' communication culture is innovative, whereas candidates from parties below average subscribe to more traditional

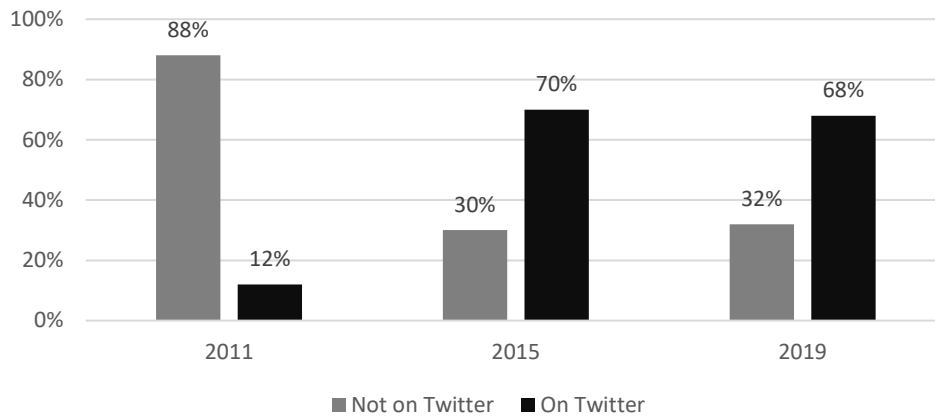
forms of communication. Another explanation is that there are differences in the candidates' ages and their use of Facebook, suggesting an age divide among the candidates (see the table below).

	Candidates on Facebook	Candidates not on Facebook
2011 (45)	43	48
2015 (46)	45	57
2019 (47)	47	50

*Age difference between candidates' presence on Facebook, 2011 – 2019. Average age of candidates is in parenthesis.*

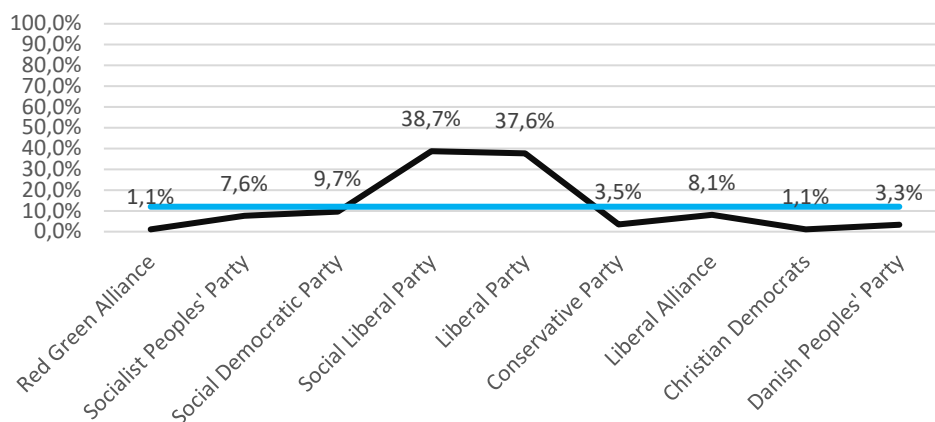
In the general elections in 2011 and 2015, there was an increasing age difference between candidates present on Facebook. In 2011, the average age difference, between candidates on Facebook and those who were not, was five years. Furthermore, there was no difference between candidates above or below the general average for the parties. Moving on to 2015, the average age of the candidates had gone up by a year, but the average age difference, between the candidates on Facebook and those who were not, had increased. Now the age difference was twelve years, but there was still no difference between all candidates not on Facebook and the candidates from the mainstream parties. In the most recent election in 2019, the candidates' average age had gone up with one more year, but both the average age for candidates not on Facebook and the average age for candidates from the mainstream parties not on Facebook had decreased. There was, however, a difference between the two groups not on Facebook by three years, which suggest that age was still a factor, but also that that there was a difference communication culture.

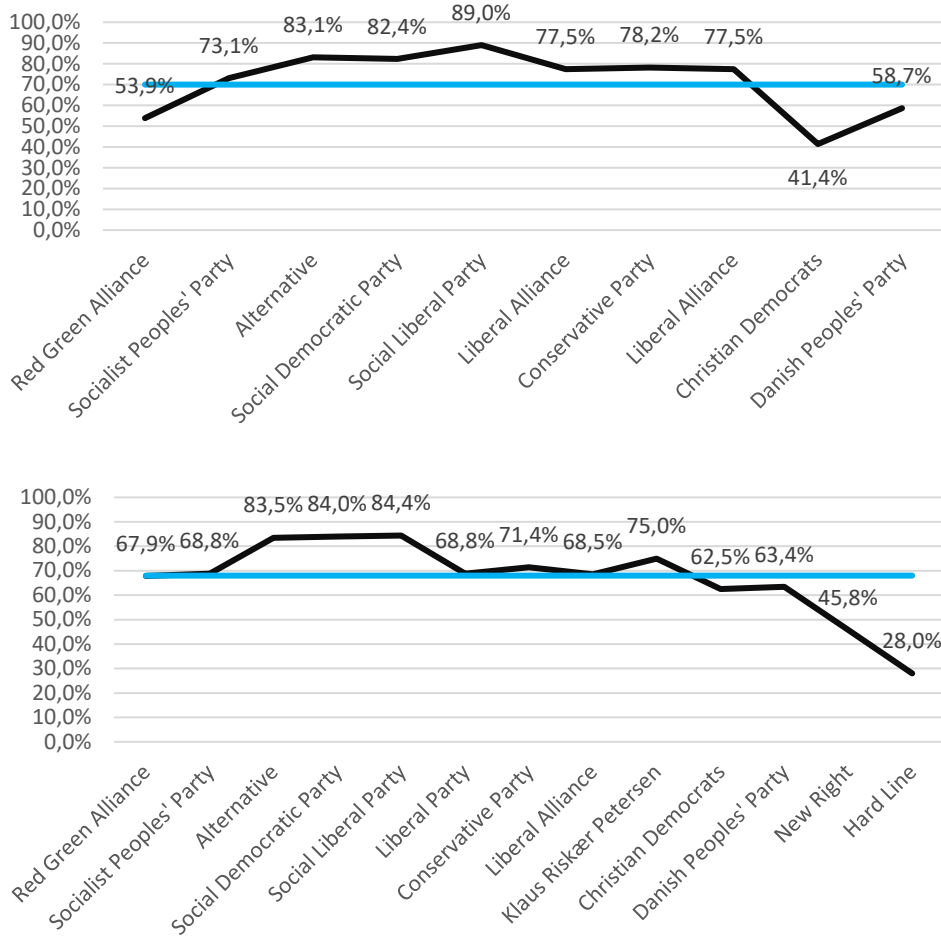
Twitter has not enjoyed the same level of popularity among voters or candidates standing for election, as Facebook has. For most candidates, Twitter may be interesting for discussions of political issues or media events with other politicians and journalists, but given the platform's limited audience among ordinary Danes, the platform is not very efficient for building direct relationships with voters.



*Candidates on Twitter in the general elections, 2011 – 2019.*

The number of candidates who were present on Twitter increased noticeably between the general election in 2011 and in 2015, and, despite a small dip, the candidates' overall presence remained high for the general election in 2019. One curious difference between the candidates' presence on Twitter and Facebook is that the first movers on Twitter were candidates from the Social Liberal Party and the Liberal Party. In 2011, when only twelve percent of the candidates used the platform, 38,7 percent of the candidates from the Social Liberal Party and 37,6 percent of the candidates from the Liberal Party were present. In the following general elections, candidates from the Social Liberal Party had a higher presence on Twitter, than candidates from other parties. In the general election in 2015, the candidates reached a presence of 89 percent, then dropped to a presence of 84,4 percent in the general election in 2019. When you consider the presence as a political continuum from left to right, it noticeable how candidates from the parties closest to the political centre not only were first movers to the platform, they have also had the highest presence on Twitter in all elections since 2011.





Candidate presence on Twitter viewed as a political continuum from the top to the bottom, 2011 – 2019. The blue line represents the average presence of all candidates on Twitter.

As the candidates' presence on Twitter increased in the general election in 2015, the far left-wing came closer to the average presence on Twitter. In the general election in 2019, the left-wing candidates reached the average presence of all candidates. The presence among candidates on the right-wing was markedly different, even if the candidates from the Danish Peoples' Party and the Christian Democrats continued to increase their presence on Twitter. In the general election in 2019, the far right-wing was fragmented by the participation of the new right-wing parties, the New Right and the Hard Line. But while candidates from the Danish Peoples' Party increased their presence on Twitter, that did not seem to be the priority among candidates from these parties.

Another difference between the use of Facebook and Twitter is the difference in age between the candidates on or off the platform. Compared to Facebook, the average age of candidates on Twitter were younger for the general election in 2011. Like on Facebook, the average age of candidates, who established a presence on the platform, were lower than the candidates, who did not have a

presence on the platform. And like on Facebook, the difference was more pronounced in 2015 than in 2019, suggesting that increased presence on Twitter among the candidates in 2019.

	Candidates on Twitter	Candidates not on Twitter
2011 (45)	42	45
2015 (46)	44	51
2019 (47)	45	50

*Age difference between candidates' present on Twitter, 2011 – 2019. The average age of candidates is in parenthesis after the election year.*

In the year before the general election in 2011, a small group of the candidates across the parties had started using Google+, but apart from a cluster of candidates from the Social Liberal Party, there seems to be no other explanation factor than common curiosity among the few candidates. In the election campaign Google+ was hardly used by any of the candidates, and when it was, it was mostly used for cross posting of content from Facebook. As for Instagram and LinkedIn, they were not used among the candidates in the general election in 2011. Instagram came to play a minor role in the election campaign in 2015, when a small group of candidates had started using the platform, but usage indicates that Instagram was used more among the 124 candidates as a coincidental add-on to the campaigns, than as an independent platform. If use may have seemed coincidental in 2015, the use of Instagram seemed more of a strategic choice among the younger candidates in the general election in 2019, where 469 from the parties had established themselves on Instagram. As for LinkedIn in 2015 the 178 candidates, who were using the platform, were mainly using the platform as it was intended, as a professional network. By the election campaign in 2019, 475 candidates had joined the platform, and many of them were campaigning explicitly, though for most candidates, the content was mainly cross posts from other platforms, mainly Facebook.

Smaller groups of candidates have tried to use other platforms, such as Flickr in 2011 or Snapchat in 2015, but interest seem to have waned quickly after the elections. The same goes for individually apps, which for short period in 2011 were something a few candidates and parties, used for one to one interaction or for online games.

### **The General Election in 2011**

The General Election in 2011 was teased out on Facebook by prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP), who in short status update announced that he would be making a doorstep announcement shortly and that people should tune into the news media. The election call did not come as a big surprise,



since it was called at was at the very end of a four-year election term. Nor was it any surprise that Facebook was going to be the most important social media platform in the election, while the use of Twitter was more infrequent among the candidates as such, and even party leaders there where only three on Twitter and somewhat active. The most active party leaders on Twitter were Margrethe Vestager (SLP), who tweeted 153 times, and then Villy Søvndal (SPP) who sent 60 tweets. Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP) only used the platform six times.

Among the party candidates, Facebook clearly out-performed other social media platforms, but also candidate websites. On a surface level it might seem that candidates from some parties favoured websites to Facebook, but by the general election in 2011 it had become practise among many candidates to used their top-level domain to redirect to a profile page on the party website or to their Facebook page or profile.

	Facebook	Twitter	Google+	Website
Social Democratic Party	93	9	3	90
Liberal Party	84	35	5	89
Socialist Peoples' Party	85	7	3	30
Liberal Alliance	59	6	9	36
Danish Peoples' Party	64	3	3	49
Social Liberal Party	69	29	11	57
Conservative Party	73	3	6	61
Red Green Alliance	66	1	4	13
Christian Democrats	40	1	1	2

*The candidates' presence on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and websites in 2011.*

The candidates on social media platforms, using social media for organising, laddering, and campaign reporting.

The Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party were leading the campaigns on Facebook, SDP campaigned, but rather weakly. The Digital Left. SPP and Villy Søvndal and Margrethe Vestager and SLP.

Video became increasingly popular in the general election in 2011. Candidates and parties shared videos on social media platforms for different purposes, e.g., campaign reporting, election songs, pushing issue, promoting candidates, and negative campaigning. Some videos were clearly low budget and often of poor quality, but candidates also professional videos produced or had the capacity to produce the videos themselves.



To the left: Screenshot from campaign video, *A Day in Voldsmose*, for Alex Ahrendtsen (DPP), 2011. To the right: Screenshot from campaign video, *Another Day in Voldsmose*, by the Red-Green Alliance, 2011.

Some of the often-viewed videos from the election campaign were delivered by Alex Ahrendtsen (DPP), in which he addressed issues of foreign criminal gangs operating in Denmark or violent criminal immigrants in the Voldsmose ghetto in Odense. Ahrendtsen was the local candidate for the Danish Peoples' Party, and he used a setting familiar to people living in the area. In the video, *A Day in Voldsmose*, Ahrendtsen is interviewed by an immigrant, who is offscreen but easily identified because of the spoken Danish thick Middle eastern accent. The interviewer confronts Ahrendtsen on his policies towards immigrants and refugees, while in the background of the video an elderly lady is violently attacked and mugged. Following the attack, the assailant throws rocks after Ahrendtsen, who is being mocked by the interviewer. In the end of the video, Ahrendtsen states that all the criminal immigrants had to leave Denmark.

It did not take long for an alternative version to surface, called *Another Day in Voldsmose*, distributed by the Red Green Alliance. The basic story line is the same, but instead of Ahrendtsen a young immigrant from Voldsmose is interviewed. In the background an elderly lady drops her bag, and another young immigrant jumps to her rescue. He picks up her bag, then he helps her climb the steep stairs. On screen, the young immigrant being interviewed tells a story of hard-working immigrants, stigmatized by the government's policies on immigration.



To the left: Screenshot from Election song for Zenia Stampe (SLP), including election strip, 2011. To the right: Screenshot from election strip video for Simon-Emil Ammitzbøll (LA): Responding to Zenia Stampe, 2011.

Another popular type of videos were the so-called *stripper videos*, where, based on an old marketing concept that sex sells, supporters of a candidate would strip on-screen, while listing the great attributes of their favourite candidate. As such the concept was not new, female nudity has been used in previous election campaigns, often by female candidates standing for election for the first time. Before the Internet, YouTube, and social media, the concept was used for election posters, but in recent campaigns, candidates had supporters strip to grab the attention of the viewers. In the general election in 2011, supporters of Zenia Stampe (SLP) launched a video, wherein a male supporter strips to the sound of an election song praising Zenia Stampe, the female candidate. The concept is very simple, but well executed. Not to anyone's surprise, it did not take long for other campaign videos to surface, mimicking the election strip and mocking the song and the music. The most popular was a video celebrating Simon-Emil Ammitzbøll (LA), which basically had the same story line: A male supporter strips, while music is being performed. The video was made by supporters and members of Liberal Alliance Youth, the youth party of the Liberal Alliance.



To the left: Screenshot from negative video mocking Villy Søvndal (SPP), 2011. To the right: Screenshot from video showing Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP) supposedly stealing a lollipop, 2011.

Another popular type of campaign video were the very propagandistic videos, which main purpose was to contribute to negative campaigning. Some of the videos were unofficial and the main purpose of them were to smear and ridicule candidates, often the party leaders. One of the videos, which went viral, was of Lars Løkke Rasmussen visiting a school and then, apparently, the prime minister snatches a lollipop from a pupil and puts it in his pocket. The video was shared extensively and caused considerable outrage in the public. The real story was, however, that the pupil had offered the lollipop to the prime minister, who then happily accepted it. Unlike the negative video, the explanation never went viral, and the prime minister had to spend time during the campaign to explain the incident and the context. Another unofficial negative video, which became popular during the election campaign, was ridiculing the party leader of the Socialist Peoples' Party, Villy Søvndal. Søvndal was portrayed as King Arthur in the movie *Monty*

*Python and the Holy Grail* and had sound bites from some of his public speeches, which were marked by terrible English pronunciation, added to a scene from the movie in which a French soldier denies King Arthur and his knights access to a castle. The purpose is obviously not political in nature, but personal since the video takes aim at his lacking qualifications.



To the left: Screenshot from campaign video from the Liberal Party attacking Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP) and Villy Søvndal (SPP), 2011. To the right: Negative campaign video from the Conservative Party: Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP) and Villy Søvndal (SPP) dance the Zorba.

The parties also ran official videos used for negative campaigning, personal qualifications are often in play, but they are not always articulated, only displayed. In an official video from the Liberal Party, Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP) and Villy Søvndal (SPP) are attacked, because the Liberal Party thought they were dodging questions about the policies of a possible coalition government, based on the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Peoples' Party. Set in an ominously abandoned factory, a cardboard figure of Thorning-Schmidt (SDP) and Søvndal (SPP) are asked really hard questions by a tense and moody interviewer. Because they fail to answer, the cardboard figure is eventually pushed over by the frustrated interviewer, ending the video on a very bitter note. But campaign videos do not have to be gloomy to be negative. The Conservative Party produced two videos, which resemble the deep fake videos produced today. The first video opens with Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP) and Villy Søvndal (SPP) dancing the Greek Zorba, then it continues to display facts about the possible coalition partners' future policies, nicely packaged in what appears to be a newspaper. In the second video, Villy Søvndal (SPP) is playing the bouzouki, before it continues to display the same newspaper from the first video. In both videos, the punch line, that if the voters want to keep the Danish economy and society from collapsing like the Greek economy, they should not vote for Thorning-Schmidt (SDP) and Søvndal (SPP).



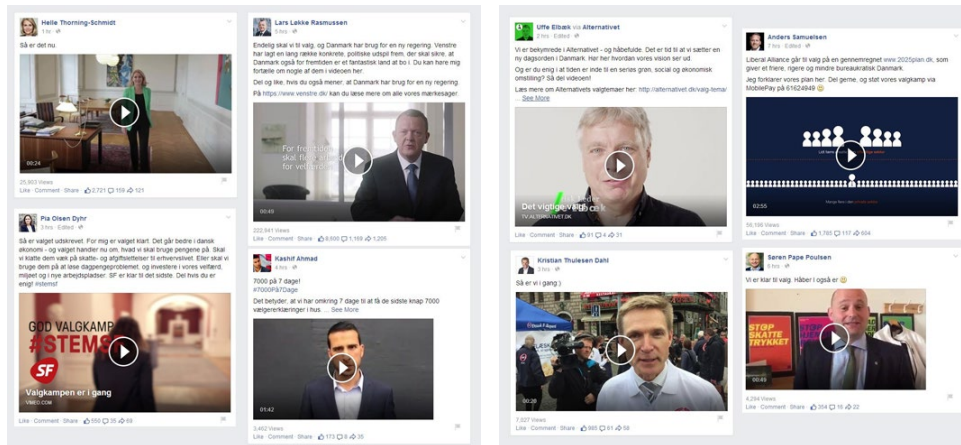
*Screen grab from the video Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt posted on Facebook, just before she called the general election in 2015.*

### **The General Election in 2015**

Like in the general election in 2011, the general election in 2015 was announced on Facebook. Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SPD) had prepared a video of her getting out her chair in the prime minister's office, and while walking towards the camera, she exclaims "Now is the time". Then the Prime Minister passes the camera, which turn to follow her down through the halls of parliament. Thorning-Schmidt opens a door to a room full of reporters from the news media and then she proceeds to take her usual place at the centre of the room. The video ends with the Social Democratic Party's campaign slogan. The pre-produced video was posted to Facebook immediately before the prime minister went to see the news media waiting at the press conference. This way, the Prime Minister not only used the press conference to stage her election call, Thorning-Schmidt also showed that it was possible for her to use social media to bypass the news media.

The other party leaders responded rapidly to Helle Thorning-Schmidt's election call. Within the first hour after the election call, most party leaders had posted their own videos, either of them responding to the election call or with pre-produced video manifests, showing the most important issues to the respective parties. Below are screengrabs of the party leaders' posts on Facebook.





*The party leaders respond to the election call in 2015 by posting videos on Facebook.*

The prime minister's video and the other party leaders' response were novel displays of what and how candidates and parties would be using some of the new affordances on Facebook during the election. Lower production cost for professionally produced campaign videos combined with increased possibilities for distributing video on social media platforms, made it possible for many candidates to add another visual layer to their campaigns. To some of the more skilled candidates, smartphones made it possible to post campaign reports on video from the campaign trail, thus situating the candidate in familiar settings known to the voters.

Media events, like the televised debates between the party leaders or the duels between the leader of the opposition and the prime minister, were also dominating news reporting in the general election of 2015. But unlike the general election in 2011, the party leaders could now use Facebook's live streaming function to comment on the outcome and issues of the debates immediately after transmission of the debates on broadcast television had ended. This tactic is interesting, since the candidates could use the live streams to set the agenda on social media, telling their followers on Facebook which issues were important, give them their own impression on how the debate went, and who won the debate. And secondly, the candidates could influence how the news media reported on the debates immediately after they had ended. Obviously, the news media, which were interested in supplying viewers and readers with post-debate analysis and comments, would switch to the party leaders the post-debate streams to get their fresh take on the debate, and in doing so, the party leaders would pre-empt the news media commentators' views by offering opinions of their own and, in the process, delay opinions from pundits while viewers tuned out.

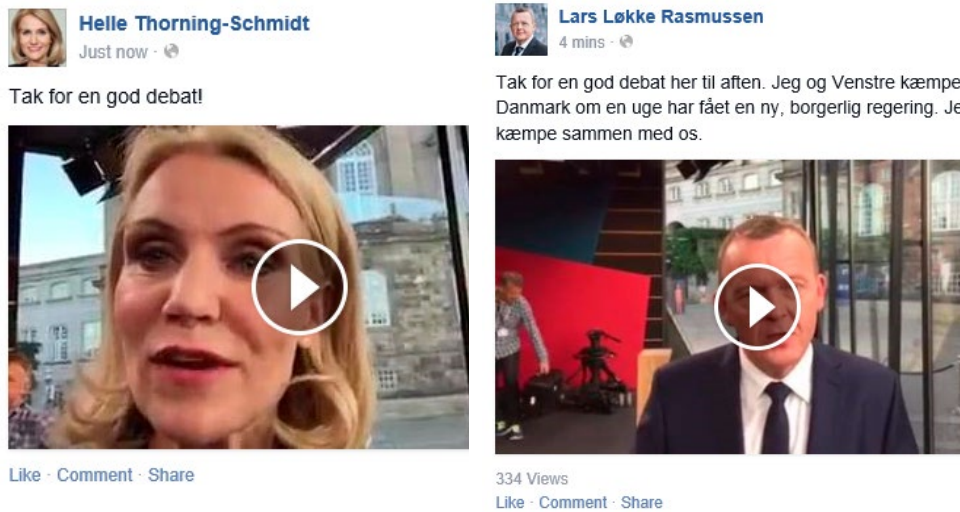


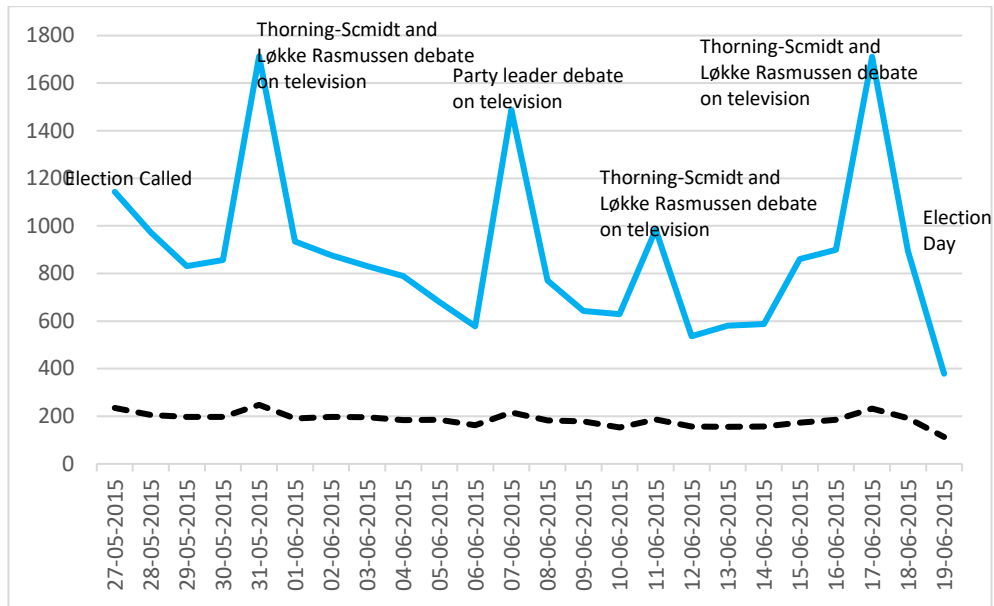
Illustration 7.3.1: Screenshots from prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP) and Lars Løkke Rasmussen's (LP) Facebook pages, both going live on Facebook after a debate on national television in 2015.

While Facebook had been the candidates' main social media in the general election in 2011, candidates were now present and active on more platforms. Facebook was still the candidates' main social media platform and their presence had even increased from 2011. In 2015, 95 percent of all 799 candidates had established a presence on Facebook. Though actual usage was less than expected, 563 candidates were present on Twitter. And then, though still limited in numbers, some candidates had found their way to two new social media platforms in a Danish campaign context, Instagram and LinkedIn. 15,5 percent of the candidates were present on Instagram, while 22,3 percent of the candidates used LinkedIn.

The media events in the broadcast mass media also influenced how candidates used Twitter in the general election in 2015. While the number of candidates, who were present on Twitter had increased to 70 percent of the candidates, only less than half of them were active on the platform during the campaign, and the average number of candidates using Twitter daily was limited to 187. The candidates produced an average of 882 tweets per day, with the total volume for the election campaign reaching 21.168 tweets. These do not seem like impressive numbers for any election campaign.

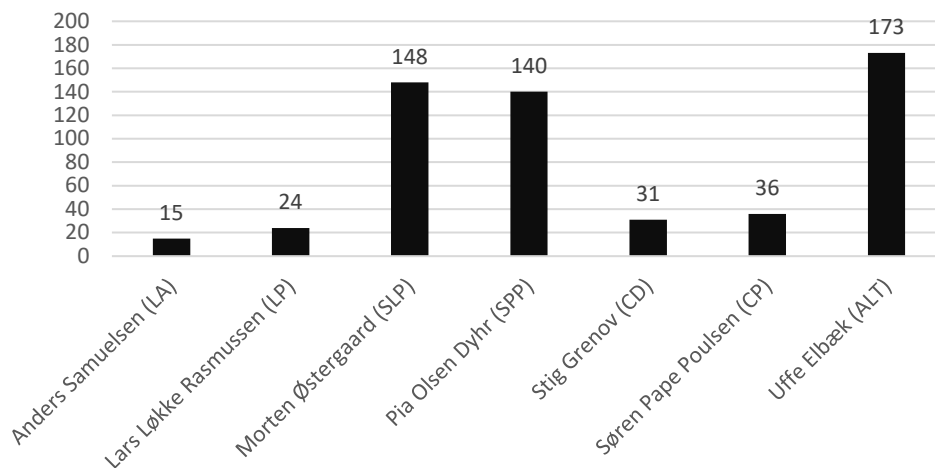
What is interesting about the candidates use of Twitter in the election campaign in 2015, is how the candidates used the platform. Apart from two political events, the election call and then election day, the candidates activities were mainly related to second-screening media events like the four major news media events, the television debates between the leaders of the coalitions, prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SPD) and the challenger

Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP), and then the televised debate between all of the party leaders, but also to a lesser degree, the individual party presentations which were broadcast every day during the campaign.



Graph 7.1: The candidates' tweets and the active users (dashed line) on Twitter in 2015.

Adding to the more extensive use of Twitter was an increased presence of the party leaders on the platform. While only three had been using Twitter in 2011, most party leaders were present for the general election in 2015, the two missing were prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP) and Kristian Thulesen Dahl (DPP). Among the most active party leaders on Twitter were the new party leaders Morten Østergaard (SLP) and Pia Olsen Dyhr (SPP), and then Uffe Elbæk (ALT), who represented the new party in the election, the Alternative.





*Party leaders and the number of their post on Twitter in the general election in 2015.*

### Enter the Platform Party

Another novelty of the general election in 2015 was the rise platform party, the Alternative. Uffe Elbæk, a former member of parliament for the Social Liberal Party and the former Minister for Cultural Affairs

The party had a limited budget for the general election. The party reported that the total cost of the party's election campaign in 2015 was 2.027.166 Danish kroner (Folketinget, 2017). For comparisons, the Social Democratic Party spend 26.785.000 kroner on their election campaign, while the Liberal Party used 24.599.835 kroner, both excluding the election budgets of the individual candidates. To put those amounts into further perspective, then the entire election budget for the Alternative equalled less than two days of campaigning for Social Democratic Party.

### Rise of the Digital Far Right

The DPP had a massive win in the 2014 election to the European Parliament. The party's lead candidate, Morten Messerschmidt, who won the election by a landslide for the party with a record of 465.758 personal votes (Statistics Denmark, 2014), was intensely active on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Messerschmidt was successful in setting the agenda among the voters Facebook and the news media on Twitter. During the long campaign for the election, he was pushing stories of decay, scandals and corruption in the European institutions on Facebook almost daily. On Twitter, he often would offer scandalous stories to journalists and the news media. Adding to this, using a simple statement and a clean, basic visual element, Messerschmidt excelled at *Like and Share* campaigns on Facebook. He would share the same message repeatedly, urging his followers to do the same, thus generating viral reach and maximum visibility on the platform. Now, for the general election in 2015, the Danish Peoples' Party had learned an important lesson, and much of their campaigning was based on organic sharing.

In the months leading up to the general election in 2015, Facebook began marking all political ads on the platform with a discrete tag, telling the users that what they were seeing was a sponsored post. Adding to the transparency of these posts, users could see why they were being targeted,



and users were also afforded the possibility of changing their ad-preferences. As with other forms of microtargeting, the post itself did not need to be visible to other than the targeted users, but at least, now they knew why. In the example of a sponsored post from Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SPD) below, the prime minister's campaign has targeted users in Denmark age eighteen or older.



Illustration 7.3.2: Sponsored post from prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP) in 2015.

Sponsored posts on Facebook were not just an option for party leaders or prominent party candidates, or the parties. Many candidates standing for election, who were running Facebook pages, could run sponsored posts because of the low pricing. In the example below, Anders Broholm (LP) is emphasizing his local affinity by denouncing the political elitism originating from Copenhagen. Oddly enough, the post targets users in all of Denmark and not only in his constituency. Apart from the obvious explanation, that he did not segment the audience for his ad, it is possible that he wanted the political elite to see his post as well.

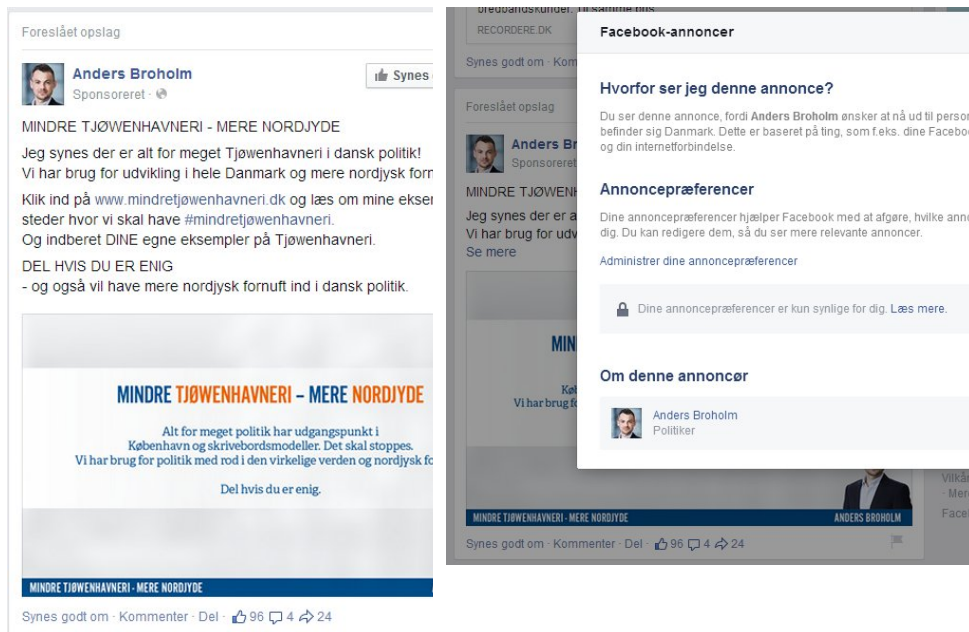


Illustration 7.3.3: Sponsored post from Anders Broholm (LP) in 2015.

### Anders Broholm (LP) emphasizing



Three examples of party sponsored posts on Facebook in 2015.

The three samples above show sponsored party posts on Facebook from the election campaigns in 2015. From the left, the Conservative Party sponsors a post which contains a link to a newspaper article on the arrest of foreign burglars. The party calls for a stop to Eastern European gangs operating in Denmark. The second is from the Danish Peoples' Party, in which the party states their policy on revoking the citizenship for Danish nationals operating

as foreign fighters in Syria. The last post is from the Social Liberal Party, in which the party invites people to join the party.



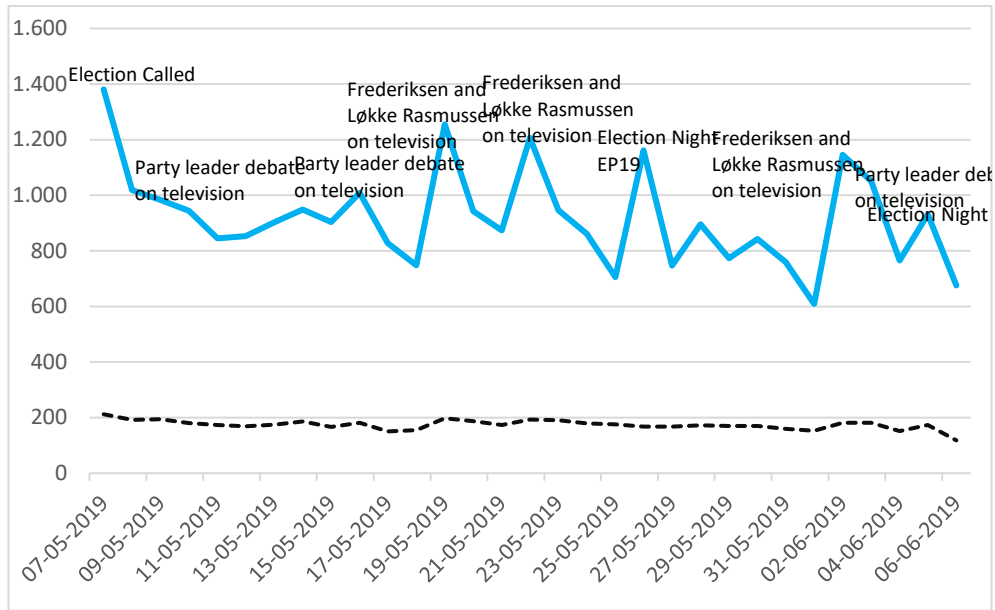
*Screen grab from the live stream on Facebook when Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen called the general election in 2019.*

### **The General Election in 2019**

Just like in the previous elections, the general election in 2019 was first announced on social media. This time, the Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP) was live streaming the transmission from the Danish Parliament's television channel on his Facebook page.

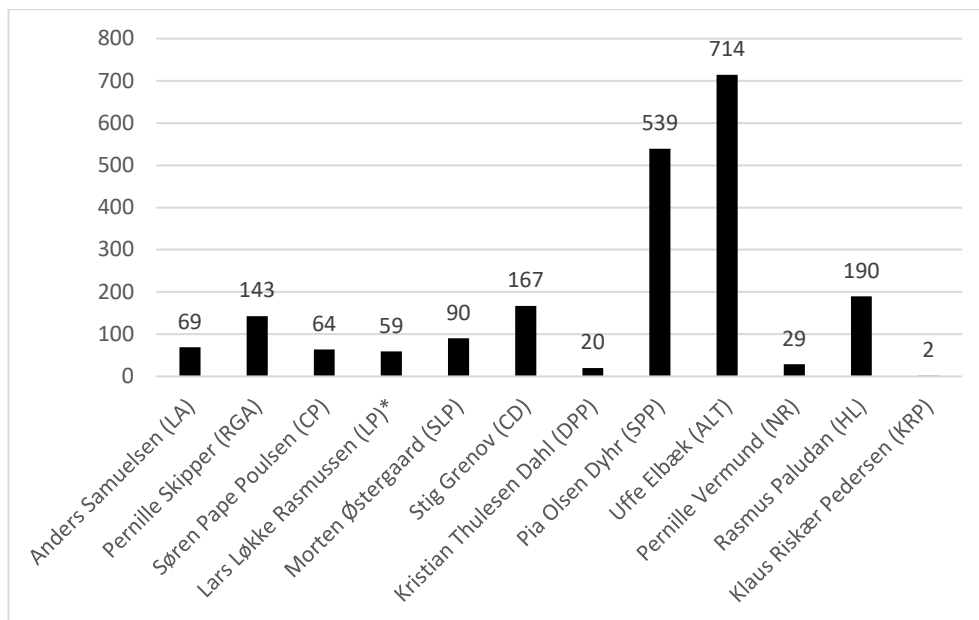
Apparently caught off guard, most of the party leaders were not quite as responsive as they had been in 2015. During the day, the other party leaders from parties in parliament responded to the election call by posting pre-recorded videos or live streaming on Facebook. The first to respond was Søren Pape Poulsen. Even the leader of the opposition, Mette Frederiksen, who had been hospitalized with a severe food poisoning, was live streaming.

At the general election in 2019, Liberal Alliance just barely made it at the polls, where it only won four seats. In 2011 the party won nine seats, and in 2019 it won thirteen seats. Even the party leader and founder, Anders Samuelsen suffered a humiliating defeat in his constituency and did not get re-elected for parliament.



The candidates' tweets and the active users (dashed line) on Twitter in 2019.

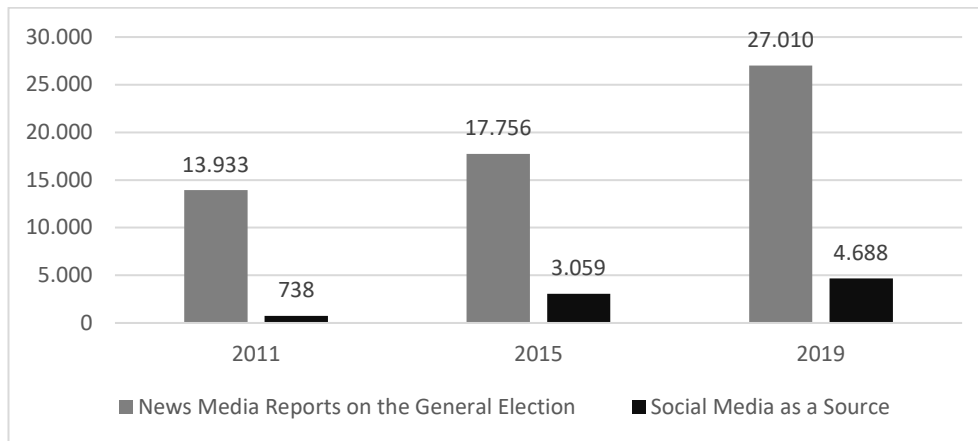
In 2019, 612 of the candidates, or 68 percent, were present on Twitter, but only 359 of them were actively using the platform throughout the election campaign. Apart from the day when the election was called, at no point no more than 200 candidates were active on Twitter. Adding to this, candidate activity on Twitter peaked on days with major media events, i.e. the party leaders' debates and the prime minister candidates' debates on television.



Party leaders and the number of their post on Twitter in the general election in 2019.

## Spilling Over: Social Media in the News Media

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan (1964) observed that “that the “content” of any medium is always another medium”. That observation has become increasingly true, when you consider the news media’s coverage of the general elections in the past decade<sup>14</sup>. In 2011, the news media produced a total of 13.933 reports from the general election. In 2015, the number of reports from the election had increased to 17.756 news reports. By the general election in 2019, the number of news reports from the election had more than doubled to 27.010 reports.

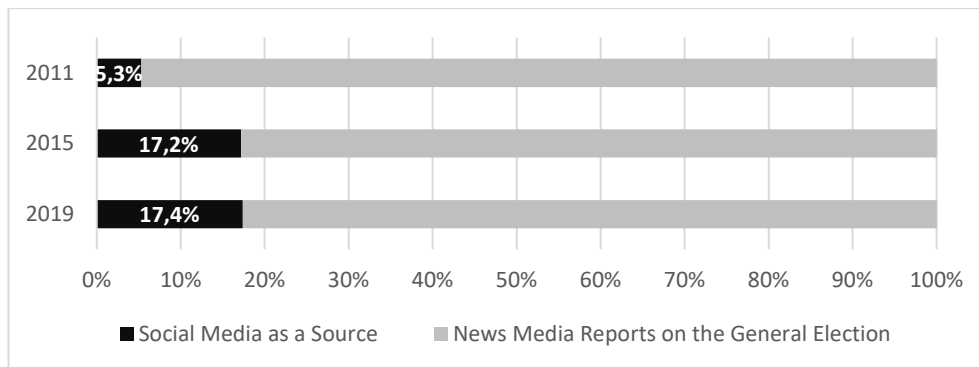


*Social media as a source for news media reporting in the general elections 2011 – 2019.*  
Data source: Infomedia.

There are several ways to explain the increase. In general, the competition among news media outlets seems to have intensified, more stories. A second explanation is that the number of parties and candidates have increased over the three elections. Ten parties and 804 candidates were standing for the general election in 2011, compared to 2015 where there were eleven parties and 799 candidates standing for election, and then the general election in 2019, in which fourteen parties and 900 candidates were standing for election. Adding to this, the increase between may be skewed, since there was an overlap between the election for the European Parliament for the better part of the campaign for the general election. As for news media reporting using social media, i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, as a source,

<sup>14</sup> The numbers used for news reporting on the general elections are based in the Danish news media database Infomedia. In the general election 2011 the short campaign lasted from August 26 to September 16, 2011, in 2015 the short campaign was from May 27 to June 6, 2015, and finally, the short campaign for the general election in 2019 ran from May 7 to June 6, 2019. Here the short campaign is defined as ranging from the day the election was called, and it includes the day after election was held. The database was queried using the search term ‘Folketingsvalg’, party names, which then may include candidates, party leaders, as well as the party organisations, and the names of individual social media platforms, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. Evidently this may cause overlaps, and thus the numbers should only be considered indicative.

there has been a substantial increase from the general election in 2011 to the general election in 2019. Reporting using social media as a source were more than six times larger in 2019 compared to 2011, but the breaking point was the general election in 2015. In the general election in 2011, social media were used as a source in 5,3 percent of the reporting, equalling 738 reports. In the general election in 2015, social media were used as a source in 17,2 percent of the reporting, 3.059 reports, and in 2019, the use of social media as a source for reporting on increased by 0,2 percent to 17,4 percent, or 4.688 news reports (graph below).



*Social media as a source for news media reporting in the general elections 2011 – 2019.*  
Source: Infomedia.

Of the four platforms which are included here, Facebook has been the main source for news reports in all three general elections, but the platform's share dropped over the years. Twitter was the second source for news in all elections, with a slight peak in the general election 2015. Instagram did not play any role in the general election in 2011, which may be attributed to the fact that the platform was launched in October 2010 (Leaver et al., 2020), but in the following elections, reporting from the platform has increased.

News reporting including YouTube decreased the general election in 2011 and 2015, mainly since candidates were increasingly posting video directly onto Facebook. In the general election in 2019, news reporting mentioning YouTube increased significantly, from 3,2 percent in 2015 to 10,6 percent in 2019. The increased news reporting can almost exclusively be attributed to coverage of the party leader of Hard Line, Rasmus Paludan, who used the YouTube as his main outlet for live casting video (Cf. the pervious case, 7.4 YouTube: Rasmus Paludan and the News). The distribution of social media as the source for news reporting is listed in the table below.

	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Instagram
2011	75,5%	18,4%	6,1%	0,0%
2015	69,4%	23,9%	3,2%	3,6%



2019	62,5%	20,3%	10,6%	6,5%
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*Social media as the source for news reporting.*

The party leaders have always had a special position in the news reporting from the general elections. The incumbent prime minister and the leader of the opposition usually get the most media in the news media. This has not changed because of social media, but social media platforms seem to influence some of the reporting about the party leaders. It is generally assumed in agenda-setting theory, that the incumbent prime minister receives the most news media coverage among the party leaders. That is usually the case in Denmark, but in the general election in 2011, the incumbent prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen's (LP) share of news reports about the party leaders of 23,9 percent was overshadowed by Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP), who as the leader of the opposition coalition to the left, reached a share of 24,8 percent. Party leader from the Danish Peoples' Party, Pia Kjaersgaard's (DPP) share was 12,3 percent.

Reporting based on the party leaders' profiles on social media platforms was limited, but also markedly different from the general news reporting. This may not be so surprising since the overall reporting from social media platform on reached 5,3 percent. As for the party leaders share, Anders Samuelsen (LA) had the largest share reporting from Facebook pages. 2,7 percent of all news media reports about Samuelsen was based on reports from Facebook. Lars Løkke Rasmussen's (LP) share was 1,5 percent. Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen (RGA) came in third.

	Share of news reporting	Share of news reporting from social media
Anders Samuelsen (LA)	3,20%	2,70%
Helle Thorning-Schmidt (SDP)	24,80%	1,00%
Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen (RGA)	4,70%	1,40%
Lars Barfoed (CP)	9,10%	0,60%
Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP)	23,90%	1,50%
Margrethe Vestager (SLP)	11,40%	0,70%
Per Ørum Jørgensen (CD)	1,90%	0,80%
Pia Kjaersgaard (DPP)	8,50%	0,60%
Villy Søvndal (SPP)	12,60%	1,20%

*The party leaders share of news reporting 2011.*

In the news media's coverage of the general election 2015, incumbent prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt's (SPD) share of the news coverage of the party leaders was 32,5 percent. Lars Løkke Rasmussen's (LP) share reached



27,1 percent, and Morten Østergaard (SLP) reached 9,5 percent. As for coverage based on news from social media platforms, Anders Samuelsen (LA) once again had the largest share reporting from social media platforms. Samuelsen was followed by new-comer Uffe Elbæk (ALT).

	Total Share of News Reporting on Party Leaders	Share of News Reporting Mentioning Social Media as a Source
Anders Samuelsen	3,40%	5,00%
Helle Thorning-Schmidt	32,50%	2,90%
Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen	5,70%	3,60%
Kristian Thulesen Dahl	6,40%	2,20%
Lars Løkke Rasmussen	27,10%	3,70%
Morten Østergaard	9,50%	2,50%
Pia Olsen Dyhr	5,20%	2,00%
Stig Grenov	1,50%	4,10%
Søren Pape Poulsen	4,20%	2,30%
Uffe Elbæk	4,50%	4,80%

*The party leaders share of news reporting 2015.*

In the general election in 2019, things were back to normal. The incumbent prime minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen's (LP) share of news coverage was 25,9 percent, whereas Mette Frederiksen's (SDP) share was 22,4 percent. Amazingly, the party leader Rasmus Paludan of the far right-wing party, Hard Line, had the third largest share of news coverage among the party leaders.

	Share of news reporting	Share of news reporting from social media
Anders Samuelsen (LA)	4,10%	5,50%
Klaus Riskær Pedersen (KRP)	4,70%	4,00%
Kristian Thulesen Dahl (DPP)	8,10%	3,70%
Lars Løkke Rasmussen (LP)	25,90%	4,10%
Mette Frederiksen (SDP)	22,40%	4,30%
Morten Østergaard (SLP)	4,80%	3,70%
Pernille Skipper (RGA)	3,70%	5,70%
Pernille Vermund (NR)	3,50%	6,40%

Pia Olsen Dyhr (SPP)	4,30%	3,20%
Rasmus Paludan (HL)	9,20%	12,40%
Stig Grenov (CD)	2,10%	4,70%
Søren Pape Poulsen (CP)	4,00%	4,30%
Uffe Elbæk (ALT)	3,00%	7,30%

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*The party leaders share of news reporting 2019.*

While the overall news reporting follows established theories of agenda-setting, where the incumbent prime minister and major party leaders receive the most coverage. When it comes to reporting from social media platforms, the news media seem to favour party leaders from minor parties and, at least to some degree, populist party leaders on social media.

### **Electoral Effects**

Digital and social media have increasingly become integrated into the candidates and parties campaigning. In the past three elections, I have been keeping track on candidates on social media platforms, mainly on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn, since that were the platforms, candidates consistently chose to be present on. Enough candidates on a platform to constitute widespread use of a particular platform. In each election there have been new opportunities, e.g., better access to data or new software, for studying elections, but researchers also encounter new limitations, e.g. Facebook shutting down access to data.

One example was Google's social media platform, Google+<sup>15</sup>, which spurred short-lived and limited attention among candidates standing for the general election in 2011. Google+ was connected to YouTube and for candidates using YouTube as a video repository, Google+ seemed an obvious add-on. But in the end, only forty-nine of candidates standing for the general election in 2011 were present on the platform, and very few used it. Another interesting platform, which attracted much attention in the general election in 2015, was Snapchat<sup>16</sup>. While Snapchat was presented as an innovative use of social media in political campaigning, it remained a niche media for interacting with younger voters. Even though some political actors continue to use the platform, overall interest had dwindled among the candidates by the general election in 2019.

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<sup>15</sup> The social media platform Google+ was active from 2011, but Google gradually closed it down until 2019, when it was closed permanently.

<sup>16</sup> Snapchat was launched in 2011, but it first became popular among younger Danish social media users in 2013.

A second major methodological challenge for Danish election is determining who the candidates are and which platforms they use.

First, it ought to be a simple task to figure out who was standing in election, but the fact is that the list of candidates remains fluid until parties have handed in their final lists of candidates to the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior, which happens as late as eleven days before the election day<sup>17</sup>. Adding to this is, that for many public officials, e.g. civil servants or journalists, it is not possible to stand in election while doing public service, and so it has become custom to have proxy candidates running until the election is called, at which point the candidacy switches to the real candidate.

Another is that parties may wish to remove candidates at a short notice, which happens if they do not follow the party line on key policies or criticize party leadership or fellow candidates. In the general election in 2019, candidate for the Social Democratic Party, Simon Simonsen criticized fellow party candidate and mayor of Roskilde, Joy Mogensen, of misguided feminism since she had chosen to become a single parent. Simonsen's criticism did not sit well with the party, but because of the election law, it was too late for the party to remove him (Gjerding Dahlberg, 2019a, 2019b).

A third challenge is that even when the candidate lists are complete, most parties are not particularly good at listing the candidates' presence on social media platform, thus making them hard to find, not only to researchers but also the voters.

It has been suggested that the mere presence on social media leads to a direct visibility among users on social media platforms as well as in the news media.

	0	1	2	3	4
Non-Elected Candidates 2011	49	43	42	0	0
Non-Elected Candidates 2015	62	50	44	42	38
Non-Elected Candidates 2019	58	52	46	47	34
Elected Candidates 2011	46	44	41	0	0

<sup>17</sup> According to the current election law in Denmark, it is stipulated in § 33 that candidates must be registered no later than at noon eleven days before election day. Candidates can only be registered if an election has been called (Folketingsvalgloven, 2019b).

Elected Candidates 2015	57	50	46	44	40
Elected Candidates 2019	0	56	46	45	41
All Candidates 2011	49	44	41	0	0
All Candidates 2015	60	50	44	43	39
All Candidates 2019	58	53	46	46	38

Table 1: Candidates presence on social media platforms in the general elections 2011 - 2019.

In the general election of 2011, candidates who got elected were present on 0,9 platforms, whereas the candidates who did not get elected were a little less present, using an average of 0,8 platforms per candidate. By the general election in 2015, the candidates who got elected were present on an average of 2,4 platforms, whereas the candidates who did not get elected averaged a presence on 1,8 platforms. Not only did the candidates increase their use of more platforms, the gap between the elected and the non-elected candidates widened. In the general election of 2019, the gap remained wide with an average difference of 0,6 used platforms per candidate, but the overall use of social media platforms increased. Candidates who got elected averagely used 3,3 platforms, candidates who did not, only averaged 2,7 platforms in their use of social media.

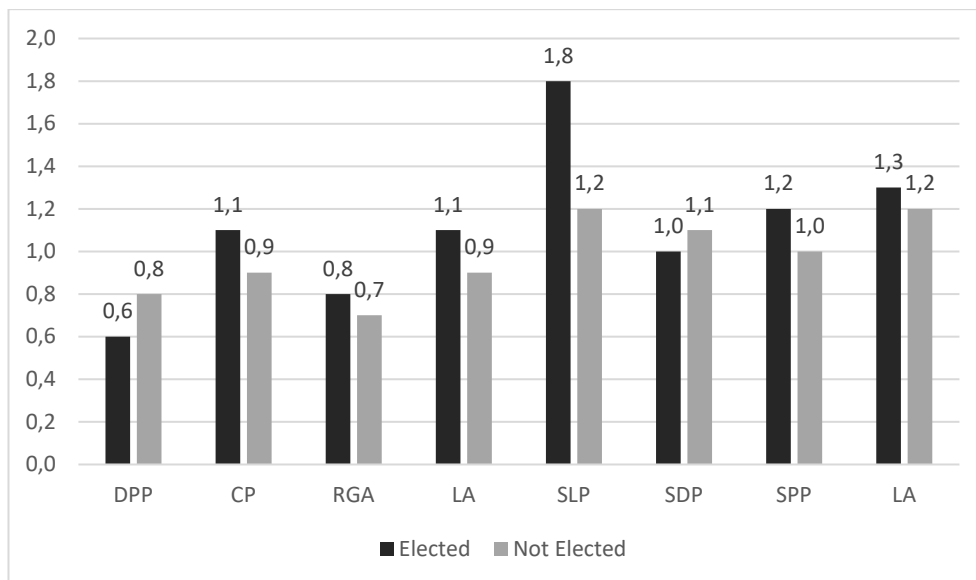


Illustration 4: The average presence of candidates on social media platforms in 2011.

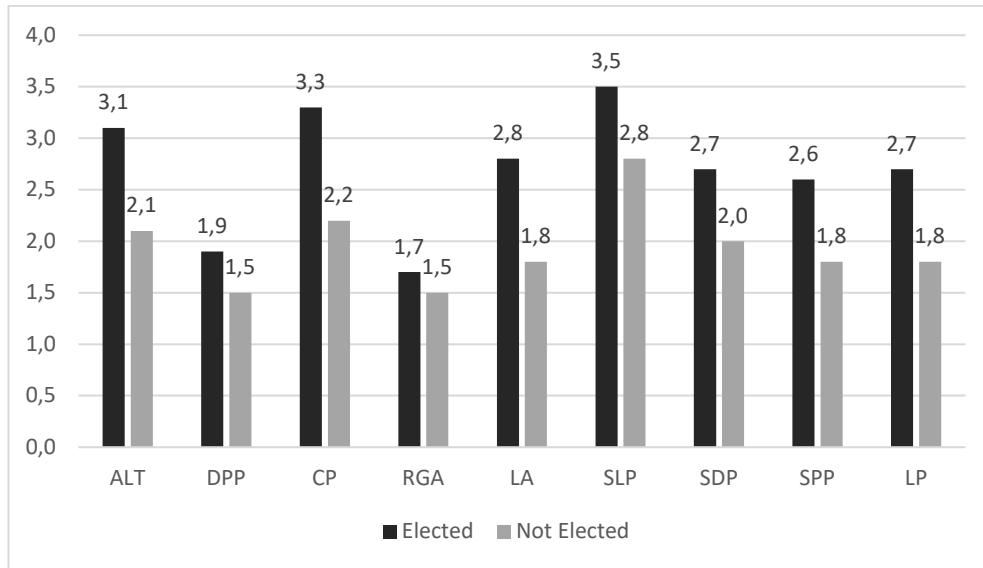


Illustration 5: The average presence of candidates on social media platforms in 2015.

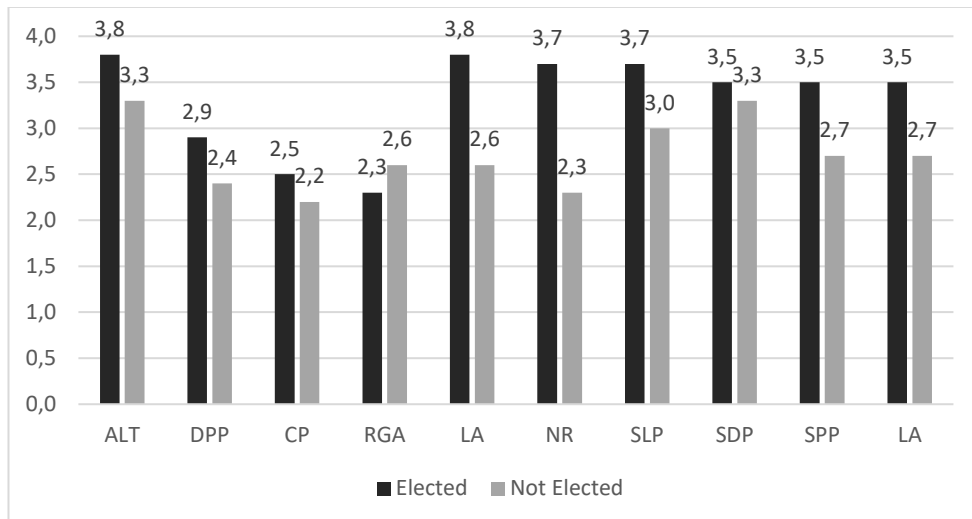


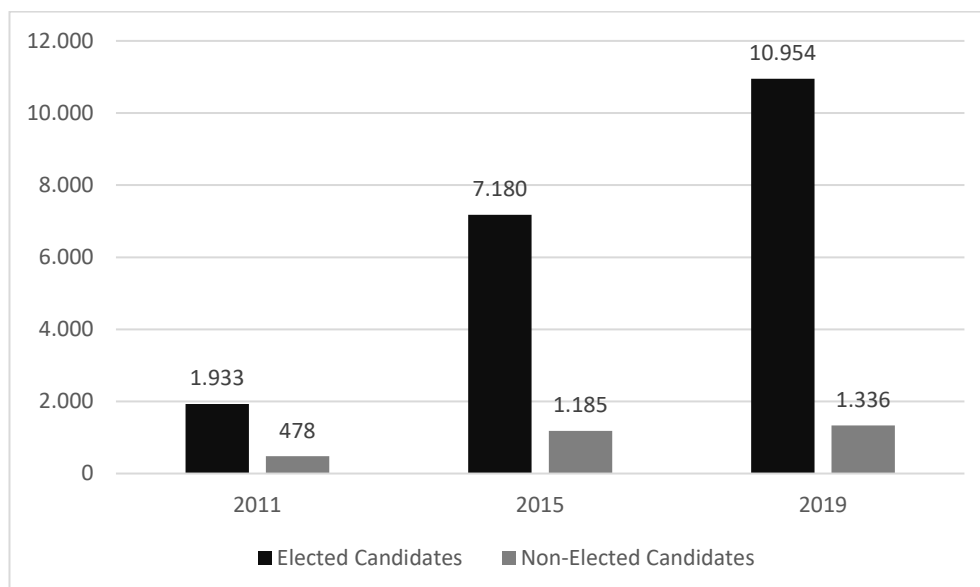
Illustration 6: The average presence of candidates on social media platforms in 2019.

The candidates' presence on social media platforms in the 2019 general election varied considerably, but common for all parties was that the candidates elected as members of parliament were active on more platforms than those who did not get elected. On an average, those who got elected used 3,3 social media platforms, whereas the average for non-elected candidates was 2,7 social media platforms.

The exception to this pattern was the use of social media platforms among candidates from the Red-Green Alliance. Here the elected candidates were present on fewer platforms than the non-elected. The most likely explanation is that candidates standing for the Red-Green Alliance do so on a fixed party list.

The number of followers on Facebook has often been discussed as one of the key metrics in elections. The idea is that *likeability* can be regarded as an expression of *electability*, or that the number of likes alone is equal to the chances at the ballot boxes. That is not the case. The short history of the use of social media in Danish elections has plenty of examples of politicians not getting elected despite the candidate has amassed many followers. Many followers on Facebook is not what causes electoral success, but the number of followers might be an indicator of chances. Elements, like incumbency, age, and gender, and of the party the candidate represents and the issues they promote, are important in interparty as well as in intraparty competition. Perhaps more importantly, the number of followers should be regarded as an expression of the size of the audience, the candidate has on a given platform. And in campaigning, audience matters.

The overall difference in followers on Facebook between non-elected and elected candidates has increased from the general elections in 2011 to the general elections in 2019, not including the party leaders. In the general election in 2011, the difference in the average number of followers on Facebook between the elected candidates and those not elected was 1.455 followers. In the general election in 2015, the difference had grown to 5.995 followers, and by the general election in 2019, the difference was 9.618 followers.



*Illustration 7: The difference in followers on Facebook between non-elected and elected candidates in the general elections in 2011, 2015, and 2019, not including the party leaders.*

The difference between candidates from different parties varies considerably. In the 2019 election, the difference for an elected candidate from the Conservative Party and a candidate not elected was only 4.802 followers. The

difference for between the non-elected candidates and candidates elected for the Social Liberal Party was 17.785 followers on Facebook. In the table below, the difference in followers on Facebook between non-elected and elected candidates are shown by party in the general elections in 2011, 2015, and 2019. The differences do not include the party leaders' number of followers.

	2011		2015		2019	
	Non-Elected	Elected	Non-Elected	Elected	Non-Elected	Elected
Danish People's Party	234	475	540	5004	2.198	15.752
Conservative Party	745	3032	1597	10264	1.003	5.805
Red-Green Alliance	418	2589	757	4010	735	6.576
Liberal Alliance	295	993	783	8666	1.726	14.700
Social Liberal Party	338	1869	1724	11906	907	18.692
Social Democratic Party	1015	3183	1256	8264	1.835	9.317
Socialist People's Party	427	1999	1576	4060	828	8.856
Liberal Party	704	1914	1694	7842	1.093	11.531
Alternative	Na	Na	2482	1233	1.429	3.212
New Right	Na	Na	Na	Na	1.640	16.636

*Table 2: The difference in followers on Facebook between non-elected and elected candidates by party in the general elections in 2011, 2015, and 2019, not including the party leaders.*

What the number of followers reveals is the size of the candidates' audience on Facebook perhaps more important are the nature of the candidates campaign and the way they interact with their followers. Far more research is needed to show how the voters think about candidates and where they get their information about the candidate from. This calls for extensive voter surveys for future research.

The presence on social media platforms of candidates in elections has increased significantly. Facebook is the default social media platform for politicians in Denmark. In the last general election, 97 percent of all the candidates had built a presence on Facebook. But Facebook is not the only platform politicians use.

In the general election of 2011, most candidates were using Facebook, 81 percent, and only 12 percent were present on Twitter. The difference on the candidates' presence on platforms, between those who got elected and those who did not, was small. But by the general election in 2015, the candidates' presence and use of social media platforms had increased. Not only did more candidates use Facebook for campaigning, 95 percent, the candidates were also present on more platforms. The difference in the candidates' presence on platforms, between the candidates who got elected and those who did not, also increased. The candidates, who got elected, were present on an average of 2,4 platforms, whereas the candidates, who did not get elected, were present on 1,8 platforms in average. By the general election in 2019, the candidates' presence on social media platforms had increased even more. Facebook was still the main platform with 97 percent of the candidates present, but candidates were increasingly present on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. While the difference between in presence between the candidates who got elected and those who did not stayed the same, the candidates who got elected were in average present on 3,3 social media platforms, whereas candidates who did not get elected, only were present 2,7 platforms.



## 6. Conclusions and Perspectives for Future Research

*In this, the final chapter of my thesis on politics in digital society, I summarize the most important findings, and discuss them in relation to the research questions of the thesis. Adding to the discussion, I will outline the conceptual and practical contributions of the thesis, but also some of the present limitations for research. At the end of the chapter, I sketch possible areas for future research.*

### **Key findings**

The overarching hypothesis of this thesis is, that political communication on social media platforms has become a precondition for politicians and parties. Initially, social media was thought to liberate users from the logic and control of mass media and to enable them to engage and interact through new forms of mediated communication between many users. This form Thompson refers to as mediated online interaction, and we know this form of communication from our experiences with social media platforms. Adding to the hypothesis, I suggest that social media platforms have their own version of media logic, which van Dijck and Poell refer to as social media logic, and while politicians and parties have gained communication autonomy from mass media, they now face the limitations of social media platforms, and must submit to new forms of media logic, as well as increased mediatization of politics.

In a Danish context, politicians' presence on and use of different social media platforms has increased significantly in the past decade. In 2010, most of the Members of Parliament, who used social media platforms, used Facebook as the primary platform, if not as the only platform. 115 Members of Parliament were on Facebook, which equals 65,7 percent. The other main social media platform among the Members of Parliament was present on was Twitter, but in 2011, only 19,4 percent were present on the platform. In the past decade, with three general elections, things have changed. Not only are almost all Members of Parliament present on Facebook, 98,9 percent of the Members of Parliament is on Facebook, they are also present in significant numbers on 2019 platforms. In 2019. 94,9 percent of the Members of Parliament were present on Twitter, 73,1 percent were present on LinkedIn, and 72,6 percent were present on Instagram.

While there have been small increases in the overall presence of Members of Parliament on social media platforms between elections, elections campaigns have been the driving force of the increased presence and use of social media platforms. In elections, the candidates' presence on social media platforms increases significantly. Facebook has consistently been the default social

media platform for politicians campaigning in Danish elections. In the last general election, 97 percent of all the candidates had built a presence on Facebook. But Facebook is not the only platform politicians use. In the general election of 2011, most candidates were using Facebook, 81 percent, and only 12 percent were present on Twitter. The difference on the candidates' presence on platforms, between those who got elected and those who did not, was small. By the general election in 2015, the candidates' presence and use of social media platforms had increased. Not only did more candidates use Facebook for campaigning, 95 percent, the candidates were also present on more platforms. The difference in the candidates' presence on platforms, between the candidates who got elected and those who did not, also increased. The candidates, who got elected, were present on an average of 2,4 platforms, whereas the candidates, who did not get elected, were present on 1,8 platforms in average. By the general election in 2019, the candidates' presence on social media platforms had increased even more. Facebook was still the main platform with 97 percent of the candidates present, but candidates were increasingly present on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. While the difference between in presence between the candidates who got elected and those who did not stayed the same, the candidates who got elected were in average present on 3,3 social media platforms, whereas candidates who did not get elected, only were present 2,7 platforms.

In everyday politics in between elections, Members of Parliament have increasingly used Facebook and Twitter to set the political agenda. But they have used the platforms differently. On Facebook, the target audience of most politicians has been their followers and the followers' friends and networks. Some politicians with large followings have been able to transcend their networks and reach a wider portion of the population. On Facebook, the main purpose of politicians has been to communicate their agenda of political ideas and visions, but in the in course of the decade, those agendas have become almost synonymous with the politicians' personal attributes and qualities.

On Twitter, many of the active Members of Parliament have explicitly used the platform to set the agenda in the news media and engage in conversations with the media elite, e.g., journalists, editors, and communication professionals. Some engage in discussions, mainly with other Members of Parliament or known political actors, engage in conversations with the public, but only to a lesser degree, and then some just use the platform to broadcast party propaganda.

The increase in the politicians' presence and use of social media platforms must be understood in context of a constantly changing media ecology. Social media platforms and digital services are far more pervasive today, than they

were ten years ago, both in terms of the people using the platforms and service, and in terms of the platforms and digital services available. Adding to this, broadcast mass media, while still important media institutions, have been declining in the past decade, both in general terms and in terms of news reporting. Research has shown that Danes increasingly get their news on social media platforms, like Facebook, while newspapers experience declining readerships, and mass media are challenged by major changes in media consumption and media culture. Today, people can access commercial streaming services for music, like Spotify, iTunes, Google Music, and streaming services for movies and television series, on services like Netflix and HBO, but also services with user generated content, like YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook Watch, and Twitch. To stay relevant in a changing digital society, even broadcast companies have entered the market for streaming services, pandering much of the same content available elsewhere. While the list of new social media platforms is growing, the main platforms for politics have consistently been Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and in more recent years Instagram. Adding to this, the platforms have changed substantially in the past decade. Exploring the social media logic of platforms shows that they are not the same as they were in the beginning of the decade. In the past decade, news forms of affordances have been made available on the platforms, e.g., the *like* on Facebook, increased sharing of visual content, targeted advertising, while other affordances have been depreciated. Furthermore, platforms have increasingly been enveloped in the development of cross platform access on multiple devices and gadgets, e.g., desktop browsing, tablets, smartphones, smart watches, television sets, etc, while at the same time social media platform owners have also engaged in increased moderation and user regulation.

### RQ1

This brings me to the first research question, which is: *Does the politicians' use of social media platforms exert an agenda-setting influence? And if so, how is it practiced?*

In the past decade, Danish politicians have increasingly used social media platforms, with Facebook as the default platform, to post content on political issues, ideas, and visions, and in effect set the political agenda among their followers. As the social media platforms' affordances have developed, visual communication has become increasingly more important. Photos become multi-layered, showing the politicians contextualised with the issue at stake in familiar settings known by the followers, together with the people, and sometimes in the company of experts, factory workers or factory owners, nurses and doctors, teachers and kids, the people for whom the presented issue matters, and often with an interested audience present in the photos. Photos

add to the politicians' authenticity. When posted together with the discussion of political issues, photos add to the personal attributes of the politician. When a user shares a post with an issue that matters to them, the user also shares the politicians' personal attributes. Sharing issues then becomes a powerful mode of sharing the personal. Taken together, the benefits of posting photos or video, i.e., the dual purpose of the visual, have become more important to the politician than marginal higher shares of more engaging text only posts.

The main audience on social media platforms have been the politicians' followers, and the followers' friends and networks, but over the years, the politicians' posts on social media have increasingly become the source for news media reporting.

Politicians' posts on social media platforms during elections have also become the source of news during elections. And increasingly so for especially popular and populist politicians, who are able to generate massive attention on social media platforms. Traditionally, the party leaders have received most media coverage during the general elections in the news media. This has not changed with the uptake of social media. Among the party leaders, the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition are among those who get most media coverage in elections. In the general election in 2011 and in 2015, the party leaders of the right-wing opposition party the Danish People's Party were very visible in the news media coverage. In 2011, Pia Kjaersgaard received the third most media coverage, and in 2015, her successor, Kristian Thulesen Dahl even surpassed Lars Løkke Rasmussen in media coverage. As I have shown, remarkably, in the general election of 2019, the party leader of the populist far right-wing party, Rasmus Paludan received third most media coverage. Although he did not get elected, Paludan, who had made his way to the mass media through extensive use of YouTube to circumvent mass media, became the poster boy for far right extremism in Denmark. The news media looked like it was more interested in street action, than in political substance.

## RQ2

This brings me to the second research question, which is: *Why and in which ways do candidates submit to the logic of social media platforms in their political communication?*

To benefit from social media, the candidates must be actively engaged on the platforms. They have to post routinely and frequently, to stay visible among their followers. But they must also be responsive to other campaign events, e.g., when the election is called or when election posters are allowed to be displayed in the streets and public spaces, and media events. The media events

can take place on the same platform, across different media platforms, or in the mass media.

In the elections, large media events, like the television debates with all party leaders or the televised duels between the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition, have major turning points in the election campaigns, also on social media. On Twitter, candidates, parties, and supporters of either coalition participate in second screening the debates. On Facebook, the party leaders in the media share their political messages before and after the televised debates. In general, the candidates and parties have become more responsive to media events, yet at the same time, candidates remain focused on running their own campaigns on social media.

### **RQ3**

This brings me to the third and final research question is: *What are the candidates' possibilities and limitations for setting the agenda in the political debates and election campaigns, when social media have become a precondition for political communications?*

One explanation for the increased responsiveness among candidates standing in elections can be found in Skovsgaard and Van Dalen's study of the general election in 2011, where they found that candidates used social media to "generate coverage in the traditional mass media", while challengers were "more likely to use social media to compensate for lack of attention from the mainstream media". Today it is worth noting, that the candidates, who do generate coverage in the news media, use social media to amplify the media coverage by linking to it and sharing it, making the distance between those who get coverage and those who do not wider.

Adding to this, for many candidates, the reality is that they will receive little or no media coverage during the election campaigns. The national media, e.g., newspapers and television, focus on the party leaders, prominent candidates, e.g., political speakers or incumbent ministers, and parties. For many candidates, the best hope for media coverage are the regional and local news media in their constituencies, but even here competition for media coverage is hard. On social media platforms, most candidates are running their campaigns to inform and engage voters. The candidates report from the campaign trail and engage followers and potential voters. For many candidates, the presence on and use of social media have become integrated part of their campaign mix, and many election campaigns can be described as variants of hybrid campaigning.

One of the tasks of hybrid campaigning is to attract more and new followers during the election campaign. To benefit from campaigning on social media

it is important, but not enough to have many followers. Candidates must be active on social media platforms and be able to engage their followers, and if possible, also a wider public. Often the most successful candidates on social media platforms are those who propose value based ideas or discuss issues which may seem divisive or conflictual. Often these issues correspond well with many of the issues on the news media's agenda. Candidates, who do not actively use social media for campaigning or who refrain from discussing the hard issues, often fail to generate attention and visibility.

Obviously, controversial ideas often generate attention, but on social media platforms, these controversial issues generate engagement, and thus more visibility on the platforms.

### **Key Contributions of the Thesis**

In this thesis, I hope to have shown that we must have an institutional perspective on research of politics in the digital society which includes research in social media logics and mediatization.

If we are to make sense of the transformative shift of political communication and platformization, which includes the reconfiguration of a high choice hybrid media system which is subject to extensive media regulation, and if we are to understand the new public spheres in a modern digital society such as the Danish, which still functions under the constraints of a democracy with long standing traditions, norms and values, and a strong electoral system; we need to view social media platforms as media with specific media logics, which work in duality with other forms of media logic, and which causes not only an increase in the mediatization of politics, but a change of the workings of mediatization as such.

Society is media twisted and politics is mediatized. We can only understand *how* mediatized it really is in an increasingly digital society by looking at what happens on social media not just at one point in time, but over longer periods.

### **Research Conclusions: Still an Emerging Field**

Most of the flaws, failures, and shortcomings of this thesis are entirely my own. In my most optimistic moments, I hoped to cover more ground, than is realistically possible. Even when advised that I should accept some limits, I foolishly believed it would be possible to do more. A personal lesson for me has been that sometimes, less is *actually* more, and that the best laid plans always collide with hard realities. Always.

But I have also learned something about the field: It would be a nicety to describe research into the use of social media platforms and politics as being still limited in Denmark. A statement like that is bordering on the level of

negligence and ignorance. Had it not been for a few scholars continuous and personal insistence to contribute to the research within field, we would have no research at all. At the current best, we are only scratching the surface of understanding the developments with the political communication culture in Denmark, including technology, social media platforms, and media culture, and as such, the field is riddled with major gaps of knowledge. When trying to understand political communication culture in a wider societal context only makes it worse. Research is often too far away from political practices and political cultures. Research is not embedded with politicians or parties, but scholars observe from the outside. Research in formal political communication on social media platforms often fail to connect to research of social movements, political protest, populism, and, perhaps most importantly, research is often detached from the ordinary use of social media platforms in everyday culture. One major cause of these problems is that current research lacks interdisciplinarity, as it is either mainly quantitative or qualitative. There are so many missing links.

Adding to the troubles, research is often based on cosmopolitan traditions and cultural universalism, where media and technology are thought to mean the same for everyone, regardless of differences in the political systems, the media systems, differences economic systems, differences in languages, cultural differences, including the differences between urban and rural culture. The list could go on. On top of this, American research traditions continue to dominate the field. The focus is often on short term media effects, rather on the larger impact of social media platforms on society. While we cannot always use social media metrics to predict the outcome of an election, we can safely say, that social media platforms are changing the political communication culture. It is abundantly clear, that attention in the news reporting in the mass media is directed towards the political elite, the political game, and spectacular events that might upset the political balance. As such research is often based on micro or meso perspectives, while lacking macro perspectives and contextualised institutional approaches.

In the past years, research has been curbed by lack of access to platforms and data. Increasingly, the companies owning and operating the social media platforms have closed off access for researchers and limited it to a select few scholars, who had to have their projects assessed and accepted before they could begin their research. The backdrop for this decision was the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Obviously, the intended misuse of people's personal data was not acceptable by any standard. And it should have been dealt with appropriately. But in any form of democracy, curbing research and transparency is not an acceptable solution. As researchers, we can continue to complain to the companies about this, but we should also call on politicians

to secure open and free research and access to data. As a Danish researcher, living in the European Union, I have welcomed the Unions efforts to oversee and regulate social media platforms. In my opinion, it should be a sacred institutional principle to safeguard its citizens' personal data through regulation of the social media platforms. But I also believe that it is foundational for the political institutions to compel social media platforms to allow researchers access to the platforms and their data. For the greater good. Obviously, this calls for increased attention to research ethics, but since most researchers are bound by national and institutional level research ethics, as well as research ethics stipulated by organisations like the *Association of Internet Researchers*, AoIR, it should be possible to find a politically viable solution. If we do not find a solution, research will be impossible in the long run, and this will in the end pose a greater problem for democracy.

### **Perspectives for Future Research**

The smart and obvious answer to the perspectives for further research is, that more research is need. But lesson learned, realities are that there are many obstacles for future research into social media and political communication. The field is seriously challenged by lack of institutional funding and attention. And as the research continues its rapid growth, researchers lack access to data, money for projects, resources, attention, time, and establishment of research networks. Just to name a few of the issues. As a researcher, it is like missing the proverbial boat, as a society, it is like missing out on our recent past and our current political communication culture.

Nevertheless, being a hopeless optimist by nature and driven by a deeply rooted interest in the field, I will continue to explore it in the future. I began my own research into social media and politics as a blogger and a small business owner with a political interest back in 2008. Spurred on by the developments in technology, media, and politics, I resumed my master studies at the University of Copenhagen, where I wrote my thesis on social media and politics. Then I moved on, working as a consultant and a political commentator for the news media before I began my Ph.D. at the IT University of Copenhagen. Here I have had the privilege to dive into the field, both at the university, at other Danish universities, and abroad.

It has been rewarding, but one of the reasons I remain an optimist is that I have met people who share the same deeply rooted research interest, that I have. With some of them, our research interest extended to the creation of an informal, multi-disciplinary network of researchers interested in politics, digital communication, technology, culture, and media. I hope we will continue and expand this in the future.



Adding to the future research perspectives, is the task to extend the thesis to a more comprehensive, cross disciplinary work of the past, present, and future of social media and politics in Denmark. Hopefully, I will be able to do this research together with engaged researchers.

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