

1 **Visual Political Communication Research: A Literature Review from 2012 to 2022**

2

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7

8 **Abstract**

9 Ten years ago, Schill's (2012) review article was published on the visual aspects of political
10 communication aiming to increase research in this field. It seems that scholars have reacted to
11 this call in the last decade. The present article argues that in the last ten years, visual political
12 communication (VPC) has been affected by technological advances, and with the proliferation
13 of the Internet and social media, political communication has become even more visual. As
14 Schill's (2012) article predated this period, a new review seems to be timely. To that end, a
15 combination of a systematic and narrative review is provided to highlight the results and
16 developments in this area. Findings suggest that the rise of social media has brought changes to
17 VPC, which have been reflected in the literature by focusing on key concepts in contemporary
18 political communication: personalization, populism, gender-related issues, and the effects of
19 VPC on citizens, separately on social media and in television.

20 **Keywords:** visual political communication, visuals of politics, social media, personalization,
21 populism

22

23

Introduction

24 A decade ago, Schill (2012) published a review article on visual political
25 communication (VPC) research aiming to increase scholarly attention in the field. By
26 describing the functions of visuals in politics, the main argument of the study was that due to
27 the prominent role of visuals in political communication, research should also focus on them.
28 As Schill (2012) stated,

29 One myth that must be challenged is that visuals have limited importance in politics,
30 operate superficially, or are of trivial consequence. Not only is this myth incorrect, it
31 has exerted a chilling effect on research in this area. When scholars only examine
32 written or verbal texts, they are only seeing a small part of the political communication
33 process. (p. 133)

34 Indeed, visuals of politics remained “one of the least studied and least understood areas” (Schill,
35 2012, p. 119) for a long period. As Bucy and Joo (2021) strengthen it, “only in the last decade
36 or so have social scientists begun to take visuals seriously” (p. 5). Accordingly, in the last ten
37 years, scholars seem to react to this call, and the number of studies on VPC has grown markedly.
38 Articles on the topic have been published in journals such as *Political Communication*, *Visual*
39 *Communication*, *Political Psychology*, *Social Media + Society*, *New Media & Society*,
40 *American Behavioral Scientist*, or *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, and books with
41 a specific VPC focus, such as *Election Posters Around the Globe Political Campaigning in the*
42 *Public Space* (Holtz-Bacha & Johansson, 2017), *Visual Global Politics* (Bleiker, 2018), or
43 *Visual Political Communication* (Veneti et al., 2019) have been published.

44 As Schill’s (2012) article could capture scholarship that mostly predates the rise of
45 social media in political communication, its main arguments were derived from the prominent
46 role of television as a source of political information. Although television is still an important
47 source of news (Newman et al., 2022), in the age of the Internet and social media platforms,
48 different questions are formulated regarding visually constructed political messages. This is
49 underlined by Dumitrescu (2016) as well, who argues that social media platforms open up new
50 research directions in VPC. Further, according to Lilleker and colleagues (2019), the new
51 communication platforms are widely used in political communication by campaigners, as “they
52 offer to deliver compelling visuals directly to their target audience. In turn, citizens seek to
53 consume, understand and influence the political reality using various visual representations”
54 (pp. 5-6). Social media has not only increased the importance of VPC (Farkas and Bene, 2021)
55 but has contributed to the (1) distinguished attention on individual political actors instead of
56 parties (Enli & Skogerbø 2013); (2) highlighted the role of emotions in politics (Coleman &
57 Wu, 2015); (3) application of new communication strategies (Rusmann et al., 2019). As we
58 live in a hybrid media system where new and old media logics interact and converge (Chadwick,
59 2013), the effects of social media are not limited to these platforms but shape the overall context
60 of VPC. Hence, a review of this period can synthesize the knowledge about VPC, both in social
61 media and television contexts.

62 The aim of the present article is to examine and summarize the findings of studies
63 written in the last decade, compare the new trends with Schill’s (2012) findings related to the
64 functions of visuals in politics, and offer an empirical investigation of the scholarship in the
65 emerging research area of VPC. To that end, the present article provides a combination of a
66 systematic and narrative review to highlight the results and developments in this area.
67 Therefore, 499 articles, books, and book chapters –written in English and related to VPC– were
68 collected through the application of the snowball sampling procedure (Wholin, 2014), and a
69 systematic search in the Web of Science database. The starting date of the collection of the
70 works is 2012 since Schill’s (2012) review article covered a huge part of the preceding period,
71 but from then until 2022, there is no systematic reflection on this productive period.

72 This fast-growing body of literature in the last ten years underlines the emergence of
73 VPC as an area of research. A closer look at this scholarship also reveals noticeable differences
74 regarding the focus on geography, media platforms, time periods, actors, methods, and the types
75 of visuals. This article describes the diversity in general trends and discusses findings focused
76 on the role of VPC in political communication trends, such as personalization and
77 celebritization, populism, also gender-related issues, and the effects of VPC, aiming to shed
78 light both on the progression and the future directions of VPC research.

79 **The Area of Visual Political Communication: concepts and trends**

80 It is worth noting that Schill's (2012) work is not the first one that called for more
81 attention to the visual aspects of politics. As Bucy and Joo (2021) note, the works of Graber
82 (1988), Lanzetta and colleagues (1985), and Masters and colleagues (1986) all described the
83 need to examine visuals in politics. Scholarly works in the field already demonstrated the
84 importance of visuals in politics from several aspects. Graber (1996) described that visual
85 information is processed and recalled faster than verbal information. These are strengthened by
86 Grabe and Bucy (2009), who dedicated a chapter to explaining in detail, from the very
87 beginning of life, why visuals matter and how they are processed. As they put it, "visuals are
88 equally processed in the thinking part of the brain and contain a great deal of nuanced social
89 information important for political decision making" (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 21). Thus, VPC
90 has powerful cognitive and emotional potential.

91 Like earlier studies, Schill's (2012) work is still focused on the television-based visuals
92 of politics, when introduces the importance of visuals in political communication. Schill's
93 (2012) main argument is that despite the recognized importance of visuals, "the visual aspects
94 of political communication remain one of the least studied and the least understood areas" (p.
95 119). To facilitate scholars to fulfill the need for more research in the field, Schill's (2012)
96 article provides an overview of the relevant theories and literature, and builds a theory on the
97 functions of visuals in political communication. Accordingly, visuals in politics: "serve as
98 arguments, have an agenda setting function, dramatize policy, aid in emotional appeals, build
99 the candidate's image, create identification, connect to societal symbols, transport the audience,
100 and add ambiguity" (p. 122). However, it needs to be noted that from a methodological
101 perspective, Schill's (2012) article has no proper description of the review process, and it is not
102 clear whether these functions were derived from a systematic review, or they are predetermined
103 by the author. Accordingly, the present article acknowledges the distinguished role of Schill's
104 (2012) work and reflects on its findings, but due to its technical issues, these functions are
105 considered here rather as overlapping strategies and their effects, communicated through the
106 depiction of visuals, such as nonverbal communication, symbols, and issues.

107 The depiction of facial expressions, gestures, the appearance of the political actors, and
108 symbols, such as flags and logos can shape arguments, build the political image, arouse
109 emotions, symbolize broader meanings, help identification, and by documenting the present,
110 they can transport the audience to different times and space, also to add ambiguity. Further, the
111 depiction of issues such as wars, global warming, protest, or gender can be connected to agenda
112 setting and policy dramatization.

113 However, the proliferation of the Internet and social media platforms has opened up
114 new opportunities for political communication, especially for VPC. As Blumler and Kavanagh
115 (1999), and later Blumler (2016) described the third and fourth ages of political communication,
116 it is clear that from the 1990s the limited nature of television not only disappeared but
117 communication channels multiplied; finally, the proliferation of the Internet, especially social
118 media, resulted in the fourth age of political communication. Through the ages, on all these
119 channels, the television, and the Internet, especially social media platforms, such as Facebook,
120 Instagram, and YouTube, political communication became increasingly visual.

121
122 Compared to television, social media provides different affordances than audiovisual
123 media with a lesser role of media control (Stromer-Galley, 2014), the networked media logic
124 (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), and new communication genres (Kreiss et al., 2018). Based on
125 these changes, and considering the visual nature of these platforms (Lilleker et al., 2019), it can
126 be expected that there will be transformations in VPC as well, strategies and effects do not work
127 in the same way on these new platforms. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the
128 transformation due to the Internet as a medium is not necessarily limited to the territory of the
129 Internet, since we live in a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), where old and new media
130 logics interact, and can be present on all channels. For instance, televised election debates can
131 influence social media-based political communication (e.g. Shah et al., 2015), or social media
132 posts of politicians might have an agenda-setting role on television (Gilardi et al., 2021). Hence,
133 a review of VPC research in the area of social media and television seems to be necessary.

134 Following this line of thoughts, the changes and trends of the third and fourth ages
135 (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Blumler, 2016) that reshape(d) political communication can be
136 summarized in five main points: there are intensified pressures in professionalization and
137 competitiveness, the centrifugal diversification is facilitated, anti-elitist populism is emerging,
138 and there are changes in how people receive politics. As a result of these trends, further
139 significant changes can be highlighted, which are relevant from the perspective of VPC as well.

140 First, personalization plays a significant role both in professionalization and
141 competitiveness with a heightened importance and limelight on individual political actors “at
142 the expense of parties and collective identities” (Karvonen, 2010, p. 4). Although it is not a new
143 phenomenon in political communication (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2015), our knowledge of the topic
144 was mainly based on verbal communication research for a long period. Nevertheless, as the
145 present article will demonstrate, in the last decade, scholars turned their attention to the visual
146 aspects of personalization and broadened our understanding of the different kinds of
147 personalization: a) individualization, when instead of parties, individual politicians appear as
148 central actors in the political arena, and b) privatization, when politicians are presented as
149 private individuals, their personal characteristics and lives are at the forefront of communication
150 instead of their professional features (Van Aelst et al., 2012).

151 Second, personalization of politics – also visual personalization – touches upon
152 celebritization as well, which trend is connected to the spread of popular culture, and the
153 articulated need for entertainment in politics (van Zoonen, 2006). Although Blumler and
154 Kavanagh (1999) mentioned popularization as part of the new reception of politics, the present
155 study highlights celebritization from another perspective: its main effect is that political content
156 themselves became less interesting, they are mixed with political performances, media
157 appearances, and celebrity events (Ekman & Widholm, 2017), and these trends are connected
158 to visual performances.

159 A further result of the changes in the new age is the highlighted role of populism and
160 populist politicians. As Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) described it, “this trend may be
161 transforming relationships between political communicators and their publics” (p. 219). To
162 investigate this transformation, clarity of the concept is necessary. Unlike in the case of
163 personalization, there is no widely accepted definition of the concept of populism (see Mudde,
164 2004; Weyland, 2001; Hawkins, 2009). Nonetheless, from the competing approaches, visuals
165 can be examined only from two of these. First, de Vreese and colleagues’ (2018) approach
166 defines populism as a communication phenomenon, built around (1) people-centrism, (2) anti-
167 elitism, (3) and reference to outgroups. Second, Moffitt (2016) argues that populism is a
168 political style, which refers to a “symbolically mediated performance” that unquestionably
169 contains visual aspects as well. Accordingly, considering populism as a communication

170 phenomenon or a style, the relevance of visuals is undoubted, thus, it seems to be necessary to
171 investigate populist VPC to better understand this trend.

172 Consequently, personalization, celebritization, and populism are key concepts of the
173 narrative part of this article. Nonetheless, as the way people receive politics changed, the
174 present study focuses on the effects of VPC on citizens as well. Although studies focus on the
175 different aspects of the audience's exposure to verbal political communication, the effects of
176 the visuals of politics seem also relevant, especially on the different channels.

177 Additionally, the narrative review brings in a further focus and describes how gender-
178 related issues appear in the third and fourth ages of (visual) political communication. Although
179 Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) mentioned gender issues only as examples of the populist shift,
180 as Winfrey and Schnoebelen's (2019) review article summarized, gender stereotypes still play
181 an important role in political communication, and research is still needed to overcome them.
182 Since visual appearance is one of the most striking symbols of the differences, gender-related
183 aspects of VPC need to be reviewed.

184 Eventually, the description of the importance of visuals in politics, especially in the age
185 of the Internet, and the key trends of political communication, thereby the structure of the
186 narrative review were clarified, but the area of VPC is not defined yet. To put it simply, VPC
187 is a field of political communication, related to visuals. However, as political communication
188 has no exact definition (for various descriptions see Norris, 2001; Perloff, 2013), neither does
189 VPC. There is no widely accepted or applied definition of the area of VPC. Aiming to provide
190 a definition that can help outline the topic of this article, one of the various definitions of
191 political communication can be a useful starting point. Like other authors' approaches, de
192 Vreese's (2006) definition is built on three types of actors—political actors, the media, and
193 citizens. These actors and the interactions between them are the focus of political
194 communication. Accordingly, political communication research is concerned with these actors'
195 messages, and their constructions and effects. Since messages are communicated not only
196 through written or spoken but through nonverbal channels as well, VPC can be understood as
197 the visual part of these interactions, while VPC research is concerned with the construction and
198 effects of visual political messages. Therefore, in the present article, any kind of political-
199 related visual communication, carried out by one of the three actors, including nonverbal
200 communication, appearance, and visual depiction of issues, is considered part of VPC.

201 Finally, after going clear with the importance of visuals in politics, and the definition of
202 the area of VPC, in the following, a detailed description of the methodological issues will be
203 followed by the demonstration of general trends of VPC research and a discussion of the
204 content-related findings of the last ten years in social media and television. The conclusion
205 outlines some future research directions.

206 **Applied Methods**

207 Considering the types of literature reviews, the present article is a combination of
208 systematic and narrative reviews (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). Aiming to summarize the current
209 status of VPC research, the first part of the examination offers a systematic review with a
210 general overview of the number of studies, their geographical focus, the applied methods, the
211 investigated platforms, actors, and periods.

212 For this, the snowball method is applied as Wohlin (2014) describes. The start set of
213 papers was identified as the chapters (N=14) of *Visual Political Communication* (Veneti et al.,
214 2019). The selection of this book as the starting point of the snowball procedure was based on
215 two factors. First, the book offers a unique, geographically and thematically comprehensive,
216 both theoretically and empirically grounded overview of VPC. Second, this edited volume “is
217 especially timely because of the growth and almost ubiquitous use of social media” (Stanyer,
218 2021, p. 1).

219 After the identification of the start set of papers, the criteria of exclusion and inclusion
220 of further papers were set up on the reference lists of the chapters: (1) studies (articles, books,
221 book chapters) had to be (2) published between 01/01/2012 and 07/31/2022; (3) written in
222 English; (4) focused broadly on any area of visual political communication. Accordingly, works
223 like conference presentations or theses, published sooner or later than this period, and written
224 not in English were excluded. However, studies were included regardless of a minimal number
225 of citations, and not only peer-reviewed research was included.

226 The process of the literature search is depicted in Figure 1 with a PRISMA flowchart.
227 The book chapters' references provided a huge tentative dataset (N=583) to evaluate for
228 inclusion and exclusion. Works that met the criteria (N=178) were included in the snowballing
229 procedure. With backward snowballing, the reference list of the included works was examined
230 to identify new papers to include. As a next step, forward and backward snowballing was
231 conducted with the use of Google Scholar, to identify new papers that cite the collected papers.
232 Iteration was closed when no new studies were found (N=240).

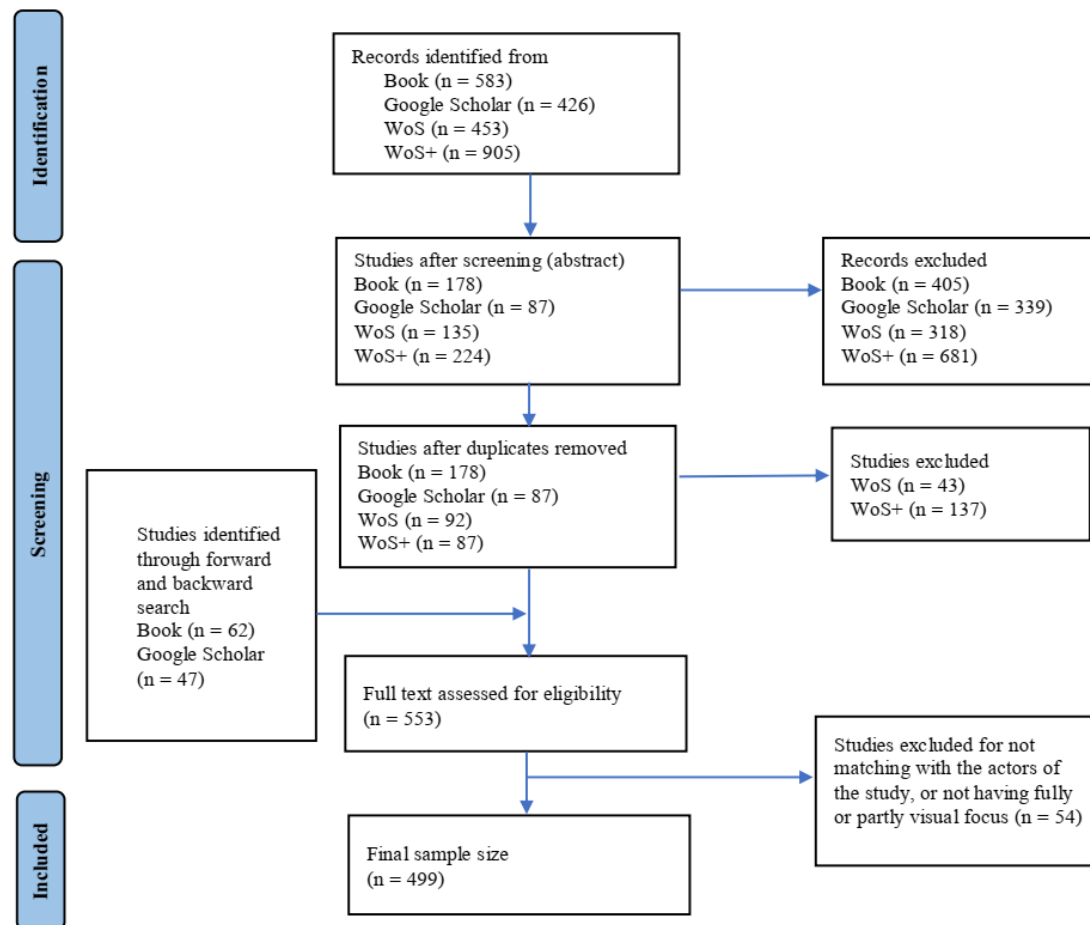
233 Additionally, in order to broaden the research into a systematic review, a Google
234 Scholar search for "visual political communication" within the investigated period has been
235 carried out. From the records (N= 426), with the additional snowballing procedure, 134 new
236 works met the above-mentioned criteria and have been added to the database.

237 Moreover, as the Web of Science (WoS) collection is considered one of the most
238 extensive database in social sciences (Chadegani et al., 2013), a WoS search was also carried
239 out with filters on the topic of "visual political communication" and the investigated period.
240 These found records (N=453) of the WoS Core Collection were further filtered into articles
241 written in English (N=385). 64 works were identified as already present in the database built
242 on snowball procedure and Google Scholar search, 318 studies did not match the criteria of the
243 present study, and 92 new items were added to the database. Additionally, another WoS search
244 was carried out by using truncations (visua* AND polit* AND communicat*) in the topic. The
245 investigated period provided 905 results in the Web of Science Core Collection, from which
246 769 studies were written in English. After reading the abstracts, 224 relevant items were found
247 in the new search. From these, 137 studies were already in the database or published later than
248 2022/07/31. Finally, after reading the articles, 44 new studies were added to the database.

249 Eventually, after cleaning the dataset, it includes 499 studies on the field of visual
250 political communication, 402 articles, 13 books, and 84 chapters¹.

¹ The list of the collected studies is available here:
https://osf.io/3a2ue/?view_only=81f4c6611f0848d7bffff27fe41ad8a5

PRISMA flow diagram of literature search (Page et al., 2021)



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Figure 1. The PRISMA flow diagram of the literature search (Page et al., 2021)

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All studies were coded by the author according to the following criteria. A record in the database contains the author(s) of the paper, its publication year, title, the type of the work (article/book/chapter), its keywords (if provided by the authors), the journal, book, or publisher of the work, its country/region focus, and the method that was applied. Moreover, the topic/focus of the research was categorized inductively after reading the studies. For instance, a paper's focus can be on migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, which are overlapping topics, thus, all were coded finally as refugees. In the case of multiple topics, all the examined topics were coded. Studies' full or partial visual content focus was decided on the basis of whether a visual analysis was carried out, or the presence of visuals is integrated into the investigation without their deeper analysis. The type of investigated visuals was differentiated in terms of still and moving images as well. The media type and platforms where visuals were examined were also coded as specifically as the authors described them, e.g. television, Instagram, Facebook, newspaper, poster, t-shirts, or stamps. The main actors of the papers were coded inductively: after reading the studies, their main actor(s) were categorized into the three actor types of political communication: political actors (e.g. politicians, party leaders, candidates, governments), media (e.g., news media, media workers, photojournalists), and citizens (including movements and other civil actors). Actors, such as terrorists, or abductors were coded as other actors. In the case of multiple actors in one study, all the examined actors were coded. Further, the studies' empirical or theoretical, and qualitative or quantitative nature was

272 also coded. The period of the investigation was coded based on the authors' description, and
273 later these periods were categorized as campaign, protest, crisis, general (e.g. the first hundred
274 days after the election, pre and post-election periods, the first year after election), or other
275 periods (e.g. scandals, conflict periods). Finally, the coding of the times a work was cited was
276 based on Google Scholar data, then in order to obtain comparable data, the number of citations
277 was divided by the number of years since the publication of the study.

278 The second part of the analysis provides a narrative review, aiming to promote research
279 knowledge on social media and television VPC. The highlighted topics of this part of the
280 review, such as populism, personalization, gender, and effects are based on their relevance in
281 political science, and their frequencies (35%) among social media and television studies
282 (N=190). Populism appeared in 12 percent of these works, while gender in 11 percent,
283 personalization in 9 percent, and effects in 3 percent. Other, not listed topics were each present
284 in less than 2 percent of the works (e.g. fake news, misinformation, or disinformation), or were
285 discussed under the highlighted topics (e.g. emotionalization, celebritization, nonverbal
286 communication). Further, the narrative review brings in the most cited studies, and in some
287 cases, less cited studies with important ideas as well, and focuses on their main findings,
288 grouped by their platform and content focus.

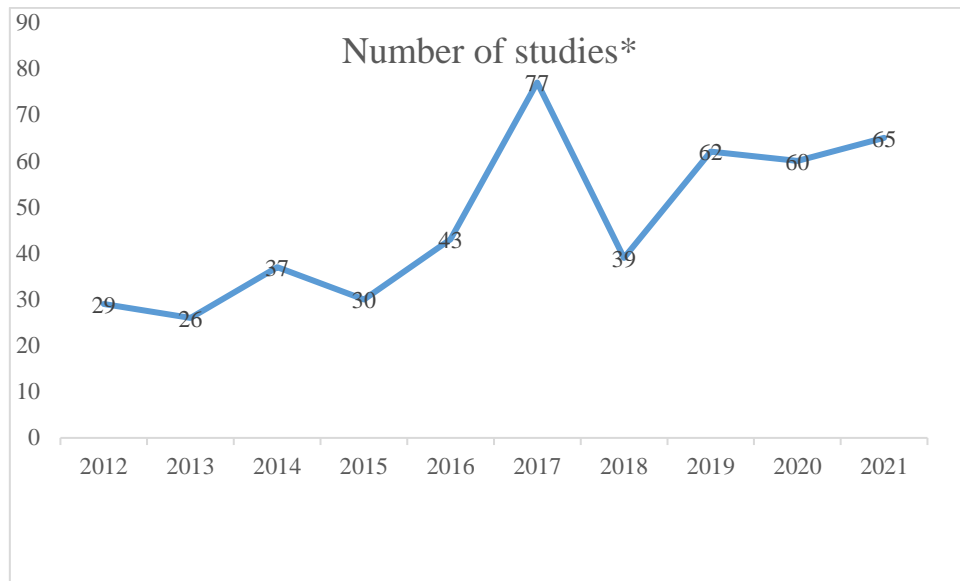
289 Findings

290 Data is analyzed in two sections: first, a systematic review outlines an overview of the
291 general findings of all the collected works, and then in the next part of the study, a narrative
292 review describes the content-related findings of VPC papers. The structure of the narrative
293 review is built on Lapeña and Peh's (2019) classification of scientific articles. The first group
294 of studies consists of secondary and special studies, e.g. review articles, editorials, and opinion
295 articles, while the second group includes primary studies with "unique information based on an
296 original-research design" (Lapeña & Peh, 2019, p. 352). Further, while the first group of studies
297 contains both theoretical and empirical works, the second group lists only empirical studies.
298 Additionally, partly and fully visual-focused works are separated. The findings of the primary
299 studies are grouped according to their media platform focus.

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301 General Trends

302 The number of studies showed moderate growth until 2016, but the next year the number
303 of works rapidly grew. However, it has to be noted that in 2017, two edited volume (Holtz-
304 Bacha & Johansson, 2017; Holtz-Bacha et al., 2017) was published with 25 relevant chapters
305 on political advertising and posters. Still, not counting these studies, this year, there was an
306 increased interest in this area of research, and then the number of studies fell back, close to the
307 level of 2014. As Figure 2 shows, after 2018, the yearly number of studies is 60 or higher, which
308 trend shows a slightly emerging interest in the field of VPC research.



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Figure 2. Number of VPC studies over time (N=468).

*As 2022 is was not finished at the time of the data collection, data from that year is not depicted in the diagram.

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The top 10 most cited studies can be seen in Table 1. This shows that the most influential paper was Saifuddin and Joerg’s (2017) meta-analysis on the media representation of Muslims. This study, just like the second most influential paper, Bossetta’s (2018) study on social media affordances, had only a partial visual focus, which means that the topic of these works focuses on visual elements, but there is no visual analysis in the research. All the other works on the list examined visuals as the central element of their analysis. Eight studies focused on still images, and two both on moving and still images. Each of the works is an empirical study, four of them used qualitative, and two quantitative methods, and four papers applied both approaches. Five of the ten papers focused on the United States, one study had no specific country or region focus, while the others examined Canada, Australia, Germany, and Europe. Considering the investigated topics, a wide range of political trends and issues stands out: celebrityization, emotionalization, media representation, technological aspects of (visual)communication, refugees, and ideologies. Political actors, the media, and the citizens are all examined in the top 10 cited papers. Four studies focused on social media platforms, one generally on the Internet, three on newspapers, while two had no specific platform focus. Regarding the applied methods, three articles used content analysis, two applied experiments, and another two discourse analysis, while in the remaining cases, semiotic and meta-analyses, and an interview was carried out.

Table 1. Top ten most cited studies

Author(s)	Year	Title	Times cited	Citation/year
Ahmed, Saifuddin; Matthes, Joerg	2017	Media representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A meta-analysis	515	103
Michael Bossetta	2018	The Digital Architectures of Social Media: Comparing Political Campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. Election	382	95,5

Lilie Chouliaraki, Tijana Stolic	2017	Rethinking media responsibility in the refugee 'crisis': a visual typology of European news	266	53,2
Mireille Lalancette, Vincent Raynauld	2017	The Power of Political Image: Justin Trudeau, Instagram, and Celebrity Politics	258	51,6
Ryan M. Milner	2013	Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement	451	50,11111
Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, Emma Hutchison, Xzarina Nicholson	2013	The visual dehumanisation of refugees	405	45
Johanna Schindler, Philipp Müller	2017	Design follows politics? The visualization of political orientation in newspaper page layout	223	44,6
Andrew S.Ross, Damian J. Rivers	2017	Digital cultures of political participation: Internet memes and the discursive delegitimization of the 2016 U.S Presidential candidates	216	43,2
Michael Hameleers, Thomas E. Powell, Toni G.L.A. Van Der Meer, Lieke Bos	2020	A Picture Paints a Thousand Lies? The Effects and Mechanisms of Multimodal Disinformation and Rebuttals Disseminated via Social Media	83	41,5
Thomas E. Powell, Hajo G. Boomgaarden, Knut De Swert, Claes H. de Vreese	2015	A Clearer Picture: The Contribution of Visuals and Text to Framing Effects	280	40

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333 Focusing on the whole database, and all the collected works, in those cases where
 334 keywords were provided by authors, words were counted by an online word-counting site
 335 (wordclouds.com). The three most common keywords are political, communication, and visual,
 336 which means that despite the diverse nature and focus of the studies on VPC, authors are using
 337 VPC as a distinctive areal marker that underlines the emerging nature of the field, just like Bucy
 338 and Joo (2021) suggested. As the frequency of other keywords shows in Table 2, social media
 339 platforms are important channels to investigate VPC, especially Instagram, Facebook, and
 340 Twitter, which trend supports the idea of a new era in VPC. Keywords related to periods show
 341 that the election campaign is also common. The widely applied method, the content analysis
 342 also stands out from the word cloud of the keywords. Considering the focus of the research on
 343 VPC, images, nonverbal and facial expressions, populism, gender, and emotions are the most
 344 frequently highlighted keywords. In general, keywords show a tentative picture of the main
 345 research interests of the field, however, since 28 percent of the studies provided no keywords,
 346 conclusions can only be drawn cautiously at this point.

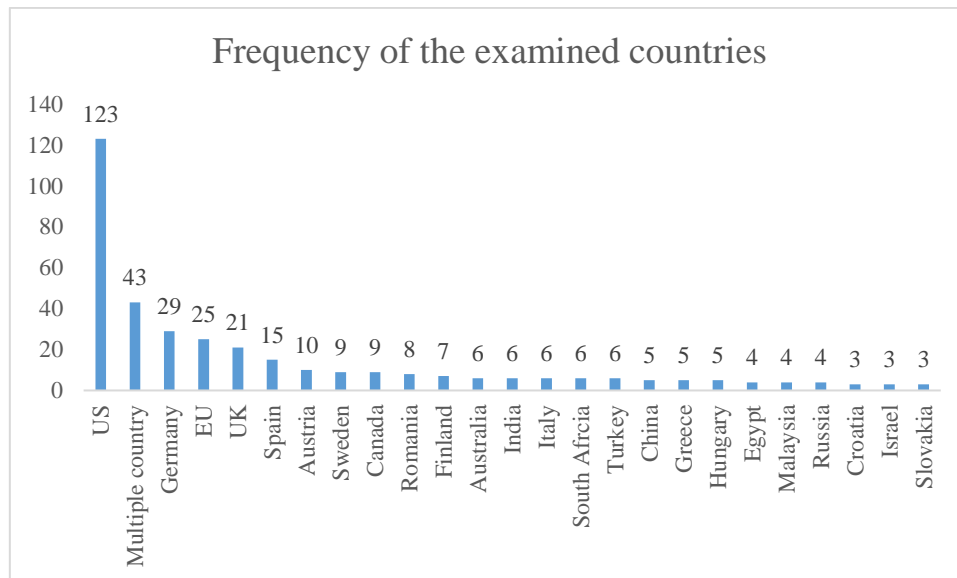
347 Table 2. Top forty frequently applied keywords

Rank	Weight	Word	Rank	Weight	Word
1	146	Political	21	18	Populism
2	121	Communication	22	17	News
3	105	Visual	23	17	Presidential
4	92	Media	24	17	Social
5	78	Social	25	16	Facebook
6	53	Analysis	26	15	Perception

7	34	Election	27	14	Debates
8	28	Framing	28	14	Discourse
9	28	Nonverbal	29	13	Twitter
10	28	Politics	30	12	Behaviour
11	27	Campaign	31	12	Culture
12	27	Content	32	12	European
13	27	Instagram	33	12	Online
14	26	Visual	34	12	Research
15	25	Political	35	11	Campaigns
16	21	Images	36	11	Communication
17	20	Elections	37	11	Cues
18	19	Gender	38	11	Facial
19	18	Advertising	39	11	Personalization
20	18	Image	40	11	Trump

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349 The scope of the investigated countries in VPC research shows that more studies
350 focused on the United States (25%) than on any other country or region. As Figure 3 shows,
351 from Europe, the most frequently analyzed country is Germany (6%), and studies that focused
352 generally on the EU (5%), and on the UK (4%) are also quite common. Generally speaking, it
353 can be said that almost the whole European region is covered in the studies, however, there are
354 significant differences considering the number of frequencies. While Spain, Austria, Sweden,
355 Italy, Finland, and Romania are the focus of more than five studies, all the other European
356 countries are studied to a lesser degree. The countries not visible in Figure 2 were examined
357 less than 3 times, these are the Netherlands, Brazil, Denmark, France, Korea, Poland, Syria,
358 Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Hong Kong, Iran, Ireland, Jakarta, Japan, Jordan, Latvia, Mexico,
359 New Zealand, Nigeria, North Korea, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Singapore, Switzerland,
360 Thailand, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela. Data show that from the African
361 region, South Africa is more studied than the other parts of the region, while from Asia, India,
362 and China are more commonly examined. Australia and Canada are still less in the focus of
363 research, compared to the well-investigated European areas, especially compared to the US.
364 Finally, it needs to be noted that 11 percent of the studies did not clearly state any specific
365 country focus, e.g. because of their experimental, or theoretical nature.



366

367

Figure 3. The frequency of the examined countries and regions in VPC studies (N=365).

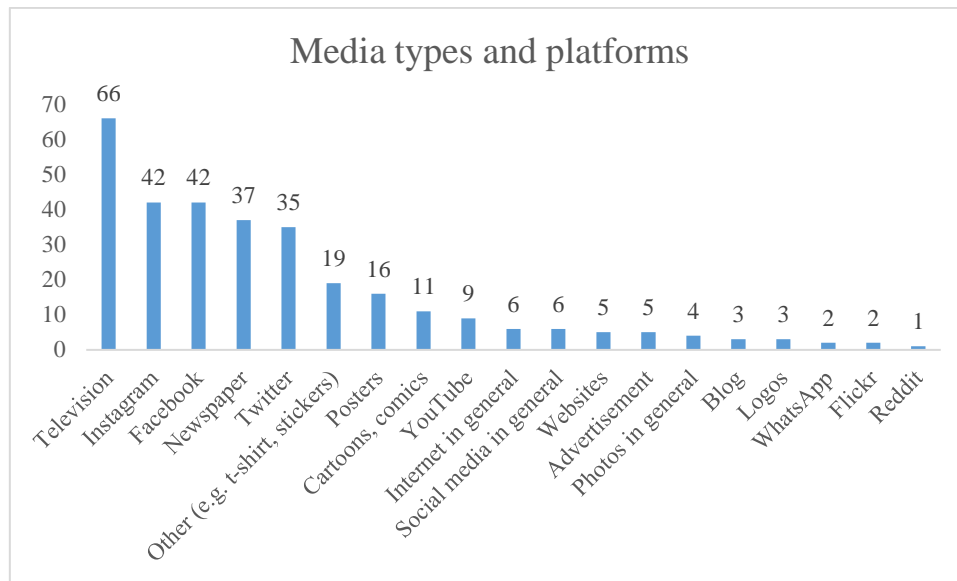
368

Considering the type of visuals that were examined in the studies, in 322 cases still images were in the focus, and only 72 studies investigated moving images. In 81 works, both kinds of visuals were analyzed, while in 24 works, these options were not applicable because of their theoretical nature.

372

37 percent of the studies investigated visuals without a specific platform focus, for instance, due to their experimental nature (e.g. Dobber et al., 2020; Olivola et al., 2012), or being theoretical (e.g. Mendonça et al., 2020; Doerr et al., 2013) or methodological overview (e.g. Joo & Steinert-Threlkeld, 2018). However, 63 percent of the papers analyzed visuals on a specific media or platform type. Studies focusing on multiple channels were included multiple times, according to the number of different media or platform types they investigated. As Figure 4 shows, television itself is the most frequently (N=66) analyzed media type, which is followed by the visual communication-centered social media platform, Instagram, and Facebook. Twitter is almost as frequently examined as newspapers, while YouTube is ranked only in the 8th place, and other social media platforms, such as WhatsApp or Snapchat are rarely examined. However, there are a few studies that focused their attention on social media in general, and all together, social media sites are twice as frequently (N=140) analyzed as television, a traditional media platform. This trend supports the relevance of a literature review on the last decade of VPC. Finally, data shows that posters are analyzed as often as uncategorizable platforms like t-shirts, or stickers, and cartoons, comics, and photos from photojournalists are still investigated.

387



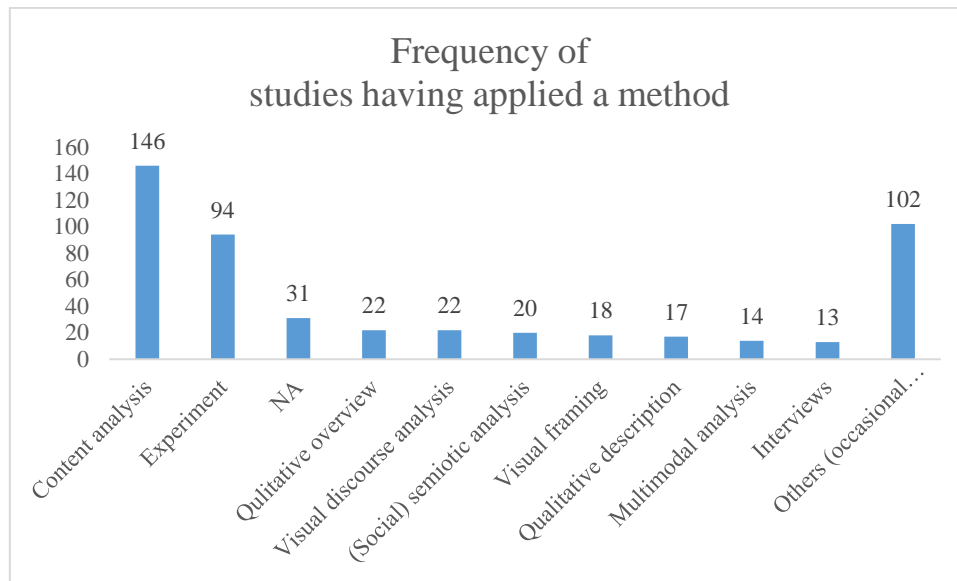
388

389

Figure 4. The investigated media types and platforms in VPC studies (N=314).

390 Built on the actor-centric approach of political communication (de Vresse, 2006), the
391 most commonly examined actors were the politicians and parties (285 cases), followed by the
392 citizens (148 cases), and the media (80 cases). In the remaining 75 cases, this category was not
393 applicable, or the actors were not unifiable into bigger categories, such as abductors or
394 terrorists. Studies combining multiple actors were included multiple times, according to the
395 number of different actors they investigated.

396 Considering the research design of the studies, varied methods are applied to analyze
397 VPC. Almost half of the studies (47%) applied quantitative methods, 40 percent used qualitative
398 methods, 7 percent combined these, and in the remainder, the differentiation was not applicable
399 (e.g. in the case of books). Turning to the specific methods, in 6 percent of studies, the applied
400 methods could not be categorized into unified blocks, or this aspect was not applicable. As
401 Figure 5 shows the number of applied methods, with 30 percent, the most frequently applied
402 method is content analysis, followed by experimental methods (19%). Theoretical overviews
403 and discourse analyses were both present in 4 percent of the works. Social semiotic or semiotic
404 analyses were applied in 4 percent, qualitative descriptions, and visual framing were also
405 present in 4 percent. Multimodal analyses and interviews were present in 3 percent of the
406 studies. In the remaining 20 percent of the works, methods like reviews, visual analyses,
407 automated methods, historical overviews, computer-based techniques, image type analyses,
408 visual rhetoric analyses, eye-tracking methods, and iconographic analyses were applied, or the
409 method of the studies was not clearly identifiable. Studies combining multiple methods were
410 included once, according to the main method they used.



411

412

Figure 5. The frequency of studies having applied a method (N=499).

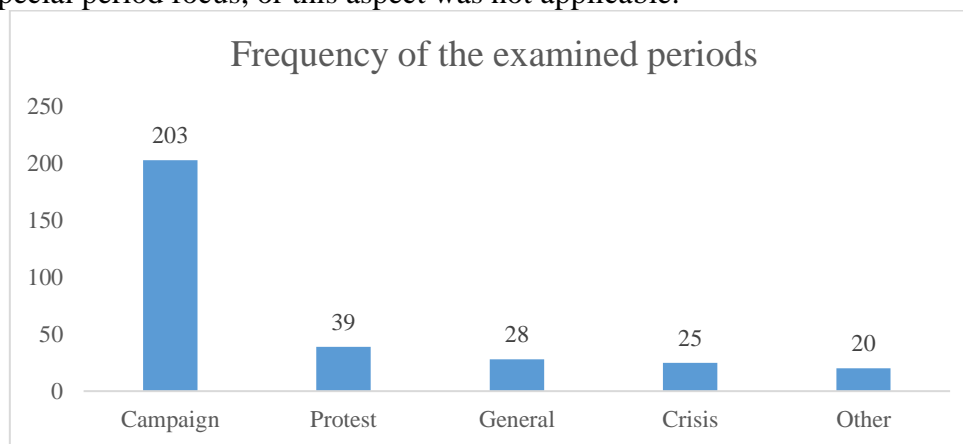
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As Figure 6 shows, campaigns are the most frequently analyzed periods (41%). Protests, general periods, and any other periods (such as wartime, conflict, crisis, pre- and post-election periods) are each present in less than 8 percent of the works. However, 37 percent of the studies had no special period focus, or this aspect was not applicable.



417

418

Figure 6. Frequency of the examined periods in VPC studies (N=315).

419

Visual Political Communication Content

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In the following, the present article undertakes a schematic content review of the primary studies with an empirical VPC approach, applying a full visual focus, based on the most frequently investigated media types: social media platforms and television. However, before this, a brief overview of the content of works that are not included in this scope—partly visual, secondary and special works—is provided.

426

Partly Visual-focused Works

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Considering the content-related aspects of VPC studies, data show 447 papers with a full visual focus and 52 studies with a partial visual focus. Latter works are focused on other aspects of political communication and include visual materials in the analysis, however, the detailed examination of the visual elements is not part of these studies, but rather their presence and effects on user engagement. The information value of these studies is still relevant to the

432 area of VPC, as they described more general findings on visuals that can inspire deeper
433 examinations. For instance, these findings show that social media platforms' affordances affect
434 the mode of political communication on them: on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, photos are
435 often used and edited to represent a more artistic VPC, however, videos are more frequently
436 used on Facebook than on the other platforms (Bossetta, 2018). Still, photos are posted more
437 often by political actors than videos (Magin et al., 2017). Further, Facebook posts that contain
438 visuals are more popular among citizens (Koc-Michalska et al., 2021). Focusing on Republican
439 and Democratic candidates' Instagram use, and newspaper articles during the 2016 US
440 presidential primary, results indicate some intermedia agenda setting between Instagram and
441 mainstream media (Towner & Muñoz, 2017). Studies with a partial visual focus also reported
442 on the connections between VPC and populism. For example, populist style elements include
443 not only rhetorical but also visual elements, such as nonverbal elements or appearance (Ekstrom
444 et al., 2018). Further, the comparison of visuals used by populist charismatic leaders can also
445 signal differences in terms of ordinary and defiant styles (Kissas, 2019). Also, the frequency of
446 visuals used by populist and non-populist parties shows significant differences: populists
447 upload more visuals to Facebook than non-populists, and they can reach higher levels of user
448 engagement in terms of shares, likes, and comments (Larsson, 2020). Accordingly, the findings
449 of these studies underlined not only the various use of visuals by political actors but also their
450 popularity among citizens.

451

452 *Secondary and Special Studies*

453 When considering how scientific materials are communicated through the collected
454 studies, 12 percent of the works can be labeled as secondary and special articles. These
455 descriptions, special issue or book introductions, editorials, reviews, and overviews provided
456 useful information on several issues related to VPC. Articles provided insights and new theories
457 on visual areas of politics that should be investigated, such as camera-witnessing through
458 phones with cameras (e.g. Anden-Papadopoulos, 2014), iconic images that gained international
459 political impact (e.g. Hansen, 2014), and the understudied role of visuals in social movements
460 (e.g. Doerr et al., 2015). Connections between nonverbal communication and politics (e.g.
461 Dumitrescu, 2016; Mendonça et al., 2022), technological aspects (e.g. Messaris, 2019), and
462 different resources of VPC (e.g. Pauwels, 2019) were reviewed and overviewed. From a
463 methodological point of view, studies offered descriptions of the application of frame
464 processing theory to multimodal analysis (e.g. Geise & Baden, 2014), automated visual content
465 analysis to study political science (e.g. Joo & Steinert-Threlkeld, 2018), and an overview of the
466 applied methods to examine VPC (e.g. Gerodimos, 2019). Introductory works highlighted the
467 presence of VPC on social media platforms (e.g. Russmann & Svensson, 2017), or connected
468 the dots between the power of visuals and their application in political communication (e.g.
469 Lilleker et al., 2019), aiming to urge more research on the topic of VPC.

470 *Primary Studies with Full Visual Focus*

471 The main findings of the primary studies with empirical methodological nature, and
472 with full visual focus will be presented based on the application of VPC on the most commonly
473 examined platforms: social media (N=140), and television (N=50). The highlighted topics —
474 personalization, populism, gender, and effects— were mentioned in 35 percent of the works
475 focusing on social media and television (N=190). Studies mentioned in each category have been
476 selected based on their reference numbers, or special relevance, such as in the case of Veneti
477 and colleagues' (2019) book, which is already commonly cited, but even the weighted number
478 of citations is unable to show its theoretical, empirical, and temporal significance.

479

480 **Social media**

481 *Personalization.* On Instagram, visuals are often applied to personalize political
482 communication. The analysis of Greek political leaders' Instagram posts showed that some
483 politicians stick to presenting only their political self, however, Instagram VPC is often used to
484 present a more personal and private side of the politicians (Poulakidakos & Giannouli, 2019).
485 In the case of the leader of the Spanish party Vox, Santiago Abascal, Instagram posts also
486 showed the presence of personalization (Sampietro and Sánchez-Castillo, 2020). Additionally,
487 an investigation of Facebook posts of German parliament members showed that visual posts
488 that include images are more personalized than only textual posts (Metz et al., 2019).

489 However, personalization can appear in different forms. In the case of the Austrian
490 leader, visual self-presentation was built around a biographical strategy, a team, and an
491 incumbent strategy by depicting Alexander Van der Bellen in personal contexts, surrounded by
492 young supporters, and popular soccer events (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017). In the Instagram
493 posts of Justin Trudeau, personalization and celebritization techniques were combined to
494 promote all kinds of policies from the issue of youth to health or transport and infrastructure,
495 e.g. by the depiction of Trudeau in front of metro cars (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2017). The
496 emerging celebritization dimension of personalization through visuals on Instagram is
497 strengthened by the examination of Swedish leading politicians' VPC as well (Ekman &
498 Widholm, 2017).

499 Moreover, personalization seems to appear differently on the platforms. A study
500 examining Hungarian politicians' VPC both on Instagram and Facebook described that
501 personalization is a common trend on both platforms, however, different kinds of
502 personalization prevail on them: while Facebook is rather used for individualization with the
503 professional, political context-related depiction of the candidates, Instagram is more a place for
504 privatization with more personal depictions (Farkas & Bene, 2021). However, in Sweden, VPC
505 on Instagram showed a strong presence of personalization's individualization dimension, but
506 from an additional strategic approach, the platform was rather used as a "virtual billboard" for
507 broadcasting purposes (Filimonov et al., 2016). On the contrary, mobilization through VPC on
508 Instagram was Podemos' main strategy in the Spanish elections in 2015 and 2016, however, no
509 other parties applied this strategy (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019). These findings suggest that visual
510 strategies are strongly shaped by contextual or cultural factors.

511 *Populism.* Visual political self-presentation elements on social media can be connected
512 to populism as well. The case of Jair Bolsonaro showed specific clothing, facial expressions,
513 and depiction of specific situations to build both ordinariness and extraordinariness on
514 Instagram (Mendonça & Caetano, 2020). Focusing on several social media platforms in the
515 2016 US election, research showed that VPC is a useful tool for populist actors to highlight
516 their anti-elite characteristics on Instagram by the application of an amateur production style
517 with amateur/anti-professional image production (Baldwin-Philippi, 2018). In an examination
518 of the Finnish national-populist Facebook images, Hokka and Nelimarkka (2019) found that
519 images are appropriate tools for spreading essential negative populist emotions, such as fear,
520 anger, and resentment without country or language barriers. Further, in a multiplatform
521 (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and parties' websites) VPC investigation, scholars
522 described that with visuals, populist parties are able to differently depict their relations to 'the
523 people'—populist parties can be parties for the people and parties of the people (Gimenez &
524 Schwarz, 2016). Nevertheless, Muñoz & Towner's (2017) study showed that Instagram was
525 somewhat similarly used in the 2016 US election campaign as television was used in the '90s
526 and early 2000s: depiction of the "ideal candidate" with family members, and patriotic symbols
527 were common, but unlike in the case of Grabe and Bucy's (2009) earlier findings, the "populist
528 campaigner" frame was not frequently applied.

529 Although it seems like VPC can be applied by populist actors for varied reasons, as
530 Bast's (2021) results showed, from many aspects, populists' and non-populists' visual
531 communication on Instagram is not far from each other. In line with these findings, an
532 examination of the VPC of all the 28 EU countries' parties showed differences only in the more
533 frequent depiction of national symbols, the leaders, and their ordinariness, while all the other
534 visual communication aspects showed predominantly similarities between populist and non-
535 populist parties (Farkas et al., 2022). Hence, these results raise the question of whether populist
536 VPC is not able to express the differences between populists and non-populists, or perhaps
537 populists are not so far from "the elite" as they communicate it verbally.

538 *Gender.* VPC research on social media investigated gender-related questions of visuals
539 as well. A comparison of self- and media-presentation of female and male candidates during
540 the 2019 European Election on social media and in the news showed that "female candidates
541 are actually portrayed more often happy on SNS [social networking sites] than in the news,
542 which echoes the interpretation of a visual communication strategy that is in line with the
543 strategic stereotype theory" (Haim and Jungblut, 2020, p. 15). Examination of visual self-
544 presentation of Dutch and American politicians on Instagram led to a result that visual depiction
545 did not differ by gender, except in the case of clothing: female politicians appeared more often
546 in casual clothing (Brands et al., 2021). In a study by Carlson and Håkansson (2022), visual
547 party communication on Facebook in the 2019 EU election campaigns' national level showed
548 that the depiction of smiling faces and casual clothing was more frequent among female than
549 male politicians. It seems that positive facial expressions and casual clothing can be connected
550 to the depiction of female candidates, which results suggest a gender-stereotypical VPC on
551 social media.

552 *Effects.* Some research focused on the effect side of politicians' visual communication.
553 Barack Obama's 2012 Facebook campaign showed that personalized visual Facebook posts
554 could reach higher engagement with more likes, comments, and shares than posts without
555 depicting him, (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2014). Within visual Facebook posts, emotional self-
556 personalization can generate even more reactions (Metz et al., 2019). Although there are only
557 a few results available on the effects of different kinds of visual personalization, it seems that
558 the individualization dimension is more popular among users: this was found by Lindholm et
559 al. (2020) using experimental and by Farkas and Bene's (2021) content analysis methods as
560 well. Further, results suggest that not only the content of visual social media posts but the
561 attributions of the posts' publisher are also relevant factors in the effects on users. For instance,
562 on Instagram, Brands and colleagues (2021) found on Instagram that "female politicians receive
563 more likes when they are present in a picture in comparison to male politicians" (p. 2027), while
564 Turnbull-Dugarte (2019) showed that new challenger parties could reach higher user
565 engagement levels with their VPC than old parties.

566 *Citizens.* Turning to the VPC of citizens, it seems that these actors' visual
567 communication is commonly examined on Twitter, especially connected to protests and social
568 movements. It seems that visuals can be used as forms of political engagement. By spreading
569 Occupy Wall Street memes, VPC contributed to a vibrant public discourse (Milner, 2013). An
570 examination of Twitter images of the 2011 Egyptian revolution showed that visual content with
571 the depiction of symbols and iconic figures can create unification "as a strategy to build
572 consensus for future planning and preventing conflict in the absence of government" (Kharroub
573 & Bas, 2015, p. 16). Further, citizens' VPC can be used for varied strategies as well. Just like
574 in the case of the Black Lives Matter movement and the ShutdownA14 protest in the US,
575 emotion-evoking photos showed mobilizing effects among citizens (Casas & Williams, 2018),
576 while citizens' visuals depicting violence during the Blockupy Frankfurt protests' were the most
577 commonly retweeted by the media and police (Neumayer & Rossi, 2018).

578 **Television**

579 *Personalization.* Similar to social media VPC research, a further research direction of
580 televised VPC is focused on personalization. The findings of Holtz-Bacha and colleagues
581 (2012) on TV party ads broadcasted during the 2009 European Election campaign in France,
582 Germany, Sweden, and the UK indicated that even in party-oriented political systems,
583 personalization is a general feature of elections in terms of the appearance of politicians in the
584 visuals. Data from Denmark and Germany also strengthens this (Zeh & Hopmann, 2013). Thus,
585 results suggest that visual personalization on television does not depend on different political
586 systems, it seems to be a general characteristic.

587 *Populism.* Although populist VPC on television is less investigated than on social
588 media, a study described televised debates' nonverbal communication as part of the populist
589 visual communication toolkit, arguing that both negative attitudes towards 'the elite' and
590 references to the 'the people' are often expressed by specific appearance, eye contact, facial
591 expressions, or gestures, such as pointing fingers, long handshake with eye contact or
592 trespassing the rival's territory (Piontek & Tadeusz-Ciesielczyk, 2019). This suggests that
593 televised VPC research could be broadened in the direction of populism.

594 *Gender.* It seems that the examination of nonverbal communication through television
595 can shed light on gender issues as well. A visual and verbal comparison of gender stereotypes
596 used by candidates in the US campaign ads showed that visual feminine stereotypes (such as
597 the depiction of family, children, and locations indicating caring) are more often used both by
598 female and male candidates than masculine visual stereotypes (like a formal attire-business suit
599 or the presence of military), however, "female candidates air ads with a higher degree of
600 feminine visual- masculine verbal conflict" (Carpinella & Bauer, 2019, p. 13). Results of
601 research on the nonverbal communication of leaders from Western countries also support the
602 idea of gender-specific nonverbal communication (Grebelsky-Lichtman & Katz, 2020). Thus,
603 there seems to be a gender-stereotyped VPC not only on social media but on television as well.

604 *Effects.* VPC in television is often examined through politicians' nonverbal
605 communication and its effects on citizens. Although an examination of the 2005 German
606 national election televised debate showed a smaller effect of nonverbal than verbal
607 communication on viewers, (Nagel et al., 2012), a study on the real-time Twitter-based effects
608 of the 2012 US presidential televised debates indicates that "nonverbal behavior of candidates
609 is consequential in driving social media responses, rivaling what candidates actually say during
610 debates" (Shah et al., 2016). Turning to more specific results, it seems that certain nonverbal
611 expressions can generate more reactions than others. As Bucy and colleagues (2020) found
612 during the televised presidential debate of 2016, Donald Trump's nonverbal populist
613 communication style with the expression of anger, defiance, and aggression generated more
614 attention on Twitter than Hillary Clinton's controlled, diplomatic, and reassuring nonverbal
615 communication. Results also indicate that televised VPC, especially nonverbal expressions
616 contribute to candidate evaluation by citizens. Based on the 2012 US presidential debates' facial
617 expressions, Gong and Bucy (2016) found inappropriate displays (nonverbal elements
618 incongruent with the communication settings) arouse viewers' attention and generate negative
619 emotions. Results of a comparison of Richard Nixon's and Barack Obama's nonverbal
620 expressions during their first televised debates showed that nonverbal behavior affected their
621 negative results, suggesting that the "Look of Losing" exists (Bucy, 2016). However, the effects
622 of smiling candidates were measured in the German local televised debate, and results showed
623 that muted depictions of smiling politicians had positive effects on the viewer (Sülflow &
624 Maurer, 2019). It seems like nonverbal communication can both positively and negatively affect
625 candidates' evaluations by citizens. However, the evaluation might be shaped by politicians'
626 gender as well: in the case of woman candidates, anger displays are punished by the voters,
627 while happiness displays are rewarded (Boussalis et al., 2021).

628 *Media workers.* Finally, unlike in the case of social media, where political actors and
629 citizens can create and control their own messages, media workers can decide what, and how
630 to present on issues, politicians, and citizens. Accordingly, issues of gender-based differences
631 are shaped not only by politicians but by the media as well. Female and male politicians'
632 emotionality is portrayed differently on television: female politicians can be seen more often
633 with positive emotional facial displays than male ones (Renner & Masch, 2019). However,
634 television news contributes to other issues as well. For instance, Dan and colleagues (2020)
635 found that refugees and asylum seekers in German television news are framed negatively, most
636 commonly by the application of the invasion frame with the depiction of faceless masses of
637 people or illegal activities for instance. Further, although nonverbal political communication on
638 television is a tool for politicians to shape their evaluation, television can make production
639 decisions on how to frame candidates as well. As Stewart and colleagues (2020) showed, the
640 electoral status of politicians determines camera angles, perspectives, and camera time used by
641 television, which means that candidates are treated differently by media in terms of VPC. These
642 results suggest that varied issues are depicted by television as a media actor through VPC.
643

644 **Discussion and Conclusion**

645 It was 10 years ago when Schill (2012) published one of the most influential review
646 articles on the field of VPC, which was mainly focused on the important role of visual politics
647 in television. The present paper offered a systematic and narrative review of the last decade of
648 VPC, which was timely because of the emergence of social media platforms that significantly
649 changed the context of VPC, even beyond these specific sites.

650 General trends showed that there is a slightly emerging interest in the field of VPC
651 research, considering both the number of studies and the use of a distinctive areal marker of the
652 field. The 10 most influential papers of the last ten years examined a wide range of topics,
653 which indicates the diversity of VPC research. However, focusing on the whole database and
654 all of the studies, it seems that in the applied research methods, there is a shift towards
655 quantitative methods, especially content analysis. Further, examination more often focuses on
656 still images, than moving ones. Geographically, the vast majority of the works focus on the
657 United States, and while some European countries are quite commonly investigated, there are
658 significant discrepancies in this manner. Moreover, campaign periods are the most frequently
659 examined periods, which might be explained by the increased communication during the
660 campaigns. The most frequently investigated media platforms are social media sites, followed
661 by television, which fact demonstrates the importance of the new communication platforms,
662 and served as a base of the structure of the narrative review. As social media provided new
663 communication opportunities both for political actors and citizens, this can explain the
664 frequency of the examined actors in VPC studies: political actors are the most commonly
665 analyzed, followed by citizens, and finally the media.

666 As the narrative review suggests, on social media platforms, such as Instagram,
667 Facebook, and Twitter, VPC is often used for personalization, populist, and gender-
668 stereotypical communication by political actors. Findings showed that social media-based
669 visual personalization is connected to different self-presentation strategies, including the
670 depiction of celebritization techniques or patriotic symbols, as well as the individualization and
671 privatization dimensions of personalization. These differences are determined by the social
672 media platforms and their affordances, as well as contextual and cultural factors. Further, the
673 depiction of certain clothing, facial expressions, situations, or emotional characteristics of
674 populism, and the application of an amateur production style can all contribute to a populist
675 VPC. However, results also suggest cautious labeling of a distinct populist visual
676 communication, since in general, differences in populist and non-populist VPC are not that

677 remarkable. Findings on televised personalization are in line with social media-based VPC, as
678 personalization appears on television also as a general characteristic of politicians' visual
679 strategy. However, populist VPC is less investigated on television than on social media, which
680 can be a new direction for television-based VPC research.

681 Nonetheless, findings on VPC indicate gender-stereotypical use of visuals on social
682 media with the depiction of mainly positive facial expressions and casual clothing of female
683 politicians. In the case of televised VPC, television appears as a media actor that creates
684 messages. By doing so, television-controlled VPC also covers the issues of gender-based
685 differences, and other topics as well, such as refugees, and candidate framing by certain camera
686 settings, compositions, and camera time. However, politicians' nonverbal communication is
687 investigated as a means of influencing factors, independent of television. Findings suggest that
688 nonverbal communication triggers social media responses and shapes candidate evaluation both
689 positively and negatively, which depends on several factors. For instance, as gender-
690 stereotyped VPC appears not only on social media but on television as well, accordingly, the
691 gender of the candidate shapes the candidate's evaluation

692 Effects of social media-based VPC trends show positive connections between
693 personalized visuals and user engagement, however, it also seems clear that besides the content
694 of visual posts, certain attributions of the posts' publisher –such as being a female politician, or
695 an incumbent party– also shape citizens reactions and evaluations. VPC is less examined from
696 the perspective of citizens than politicians, and it is mainly focused on the context of social
697 movements and protests. Further, studies more often analyze the relationships and correlations
698 than causal effects, e.g. through experimental designs. It can also be noted that Twitter is rather
699 a platform for effect studies than other social media. Results indicate that the VPC of citizens
700 can be used for mobilization, as well as negative framing.

701 It seems that similar topics appear in the television literature as in social media VPC
702 literature, which shows both the convergence of these channels and the strong link of the VPC
703 field to issues that are key concepts in contemporary political and communication science.
704 Consequently, functions of visuals in political communication listed by Schill (2012) remained
705 relevant, however, research in the last ten years of VPC got closer to political communication
706 trends. Comparing the results of Schill (2012) to the present study's findings, the most
707 remarkable difference is related to the role of television. As Schill (2012) argued, “despite the
708 rising popularity of online news, television is by far the most important communication
709 channel” (p. 119). Facial expressions, gestures, symbols, and appearances of political actors
710 can still be used to build arguments and their political image, arouse emotions, and symbolize
711 broader meanings. Likewise, the depiction of issues can still be considered as visual agenda
712 setting and policy dramatization functions. Nevertheless, unlike in the era of television, where
713 media workers could influence and even modify the messages intended by politicians, in the
714 era of the Internet, political actors have more space to create their visual messages. Although
715 television remained an important source of news, social media platforms provided a new
716 impetus to VPC. Accordingly, scholars turned their attention to these new opportunities.

717 Further, it needs to be noted that Schill's (2012) functions might not be fully comparable
718 with the results reported in this study due to the works' different methodological nature.
719 Nonetheless, the image building and emotion arousing functions might be connected to the
720 trend of visual personalization, while the depiction of symbols and certain issues, also the policy
721 dramatization function can be part of populist visual communication. Additionally, as a great
722 number of studies focused on emotionalization – connected to all of the highlighted trends and
723 aspects of the present article –, it seems that the visual turn was accompanied by an emotional
724 turn. However, considering the latest trends –which are visually still not properly investigated–
725 , new functions of visuals in politics might appear with visual mis- and disinformation, and
726 deep fakes.

727 Although television remained an important source of news, social media platforms
728 provided a new impetus to VPC. Accordingly, scholars turned their attention to these new
729 opportunities. Future research directions suggested by Schill (2012) put emphasis on the
730 construction of visual symbols, their rhetorical operation and reception by viewers, and their
731 normative implications in politics. Although these aspects were more or less analyzed in the
732 last decade, the focus of VPC research turned out to be different on the new communication
733 platforms: how visuals contribute to and construct political messages from the perspective of a
734 less controlled media environment and a networked media logic. Thus, the rise of social media
735 has brought changes to VPC, which have been reflected in the literature, as the present article
736 demonstrated. Literature on the last decade of VPC primarily seeks to explore current political
737 science issues from a different perspective, based on visibility, rather than to develop new field-
738 specific concepts and theories.

739 It is worth noting that Schill's (2012) main argument to study visuals in political
740 communication seems to be heard by researchers, the number of studies in the field started to
741 grow, and VPC became an emerging research area. However, as Bucy and Joo (2021) also
742 argue, there is still a long way to go, and scholars of the field should broaden their focus both
743 in terms of applied methods and interdisciplinary collaborations. The application of qualitative
744 methods that help understand the details of visually constructed messages would be as welcome
745 as methods based on the new technological advances. For that, cooperative works from the area
746 of computational science and VPC would be necessary.

747 Although the emerging area of VPC investigation encompasses works with a diverse
748 research focus, there is still room for improvement. There are geographical disproportionalities
749 considering the overwhelming extent of US-based VPC research, however, there is a possibility
750 that the sampling method and the focus on English publications might affect these results. Also,
751 it needs to be noted that although through the snowball sampling method some studies of
752 interdisciplinary or adjacent disciplines with detailed visual analyses of political events – such
753 as articles on terrorism, war, protest, or politics in popular media culture – are included in the
754 database, without identifying themselves as political communication studies, these might be
755 underrepresented. Further, there are shortcomings regarding the examined platforms, type of
756 visuals, periods, and actors. The audiovisual-based YouTube, moving images, such as videos,
757 and gifs, non-election periods, and citizens as actors are less examined from the VPC
758 perspective. Moreover, even though campaigns are the most popular research periods, there
759 might be new opportunities apart from national elections, and the focus on local elections, or
760 even local visual politics could provide new insights into VPC. Amateur visual production can
761 be also an important research area of VPC, considering its emerging role both in protests and
762 populist communication. New directions in VPC research could also be set to the field of visual
763 mis- and disinformation, which is especially timely in the era of fake news.

764 Further, new theoretical insights and concepts could be raised on the basis of the VPC.
765 The established concepts, such as personalization and populism, provide useful grips and VPC
766 can indeed provide new insights in these areas, however, it would also be beneficial to notice
767 and capture communicative specificities that primarily unfold in the field of visuals.

768 As Schill (2012) concluded, “not only is continued research vital and necessary in this
769 area; it also provides fertile ground for understanding political communication” (p. 135). By
770 the systematic and narrative review of the last decade of VPC, and by delineating new
771 directions, this paper attempted to further increase the popularity of VPC research. The findings
772 of the empirical review might be useful for political communication scholars to widen their
773 focus in the direction of visuals, and those who already contributed to the understanding of VPC
774 may find inspiration for new approaches.

775

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